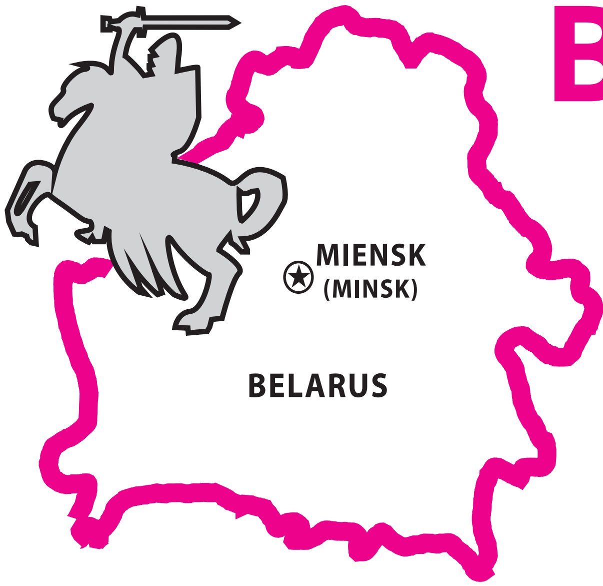
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BELARUSIAN REVIEW



SPECIAL JEWISH ISSUE

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The Livshits and Chechiks Families (Turaŭ, Mazyr district, Paliessie region, 1927). *Photo from Leonid Smilovitsky's personal archive*

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BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Special Jewish Issue (2016)

The BR editorial board would like to express our sincere gratitude to Jana Branisa, Maria Kiehn, Dr. Vitaut Kipel, Dr. Alexander Osipov, Prof. Shaul Stampfer, Joanna Survilla, and Dr. Jan Zaprudnik for their valuable comments, corrections, ideas, and suggestions.

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of our long-term editor-in-chief George Stankevich and one of our authors, Dr. Volodymyr Goncharov, who both passed away in 2014 when the preparation of the issue was underway.

BELARUSIAN REVIEW (ISSN 1064-7716) is the oldest continuously published journal in English language fully devoted to Belarus: to its current political and economic situation, culture and history, as well as to Belarusian diaspora. Since 1989 BELARUSIAN REVIEW has been filling the niche of Belarusian studies, both as a printed journal and since 2011 as an electronic edition made in cooperation with THE_POINT JOURNAL, providing a broad audience interested in Belarusian matters with scholarly and analytical texts.

Past editors-in-chief:
Joe Arciuch (1989 -2001)
George Stankevich (2001-2014)

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

Special Jewish Issue (2016)

CONTENTS

The importance of scope, breadth, and inclusion in the understanding of Belarusian history

Kiryl Kascian and Hanna Vasilevich

This special Jewish issue of Belarusian Review is the result of a project combining the efforts of "Belarusian Review," its online platform The_Point Journal, the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at Tel Aviv University, and the Center for Belarusian Studies at the Southwestern College in Winfield, KS.

The main message of this special issue of *Belarusian Review* is to demonstrate that the exploration of Belarusian history is impossible without all of its ethnic components and that the more inclusive the approach, the more comprehensive the picture of the past. For most of the 20th century, the natural development of Belarusian historical research and discourse has been subordinated to Soviet canons, which has resulted in a repressed version of Belarusian history. Falsifications of historical facts as well as their ideologization forced people to learn a history that their ancestors never experienced.[1] Moreover, numerous inalienable elements of the history of Belarus were deliberately discarded. In the reclaiming of these components, it is necessary to consider that the history of Belarus should not be approached as exclusive to ethnic Belarusians. To be *per se* objective, history should take into account the diversity of Belarus' society. This task is impossible without the presence of the Jewish component, which due to numerous reasons has been repressed and has been treated inconsistently within the Soviet framing of the history of Belarus. In launching this project our intention was to reclaim a Jewish component in the history of Belarus. The importance of this reclamation is multifaceted.

First, Jews have actively participated in all spheres of public life in Belarus and formed an integral element of its society throughout the centuries. In the early 20th century, one of the biggest Jewish Diasporas in Europe lived in Belarus. Moreover, as one of the leading experts of Belarus' Jewish history, Professor Shaul Stampfer from Hebrew University in Jerusalem observes, "almost all of the major movements in the history of Jews in Eastern Europe either took place in Belarus or had strong ties with Belarus."[2] It is not a coincidence that Belarus was a birthplace of numerous outstanding personalities of Jewish ethnicity who became prominent scientists, businessmen, artists, thinkers, political, and religious leaders.

Second, the history of the Belarusian Jews is still not properly developed, both in Belarus and abroad. This is the case despite the fact that numerous archival materials are available. Rather, the official historical science demonstrates reluctance to explore the Jewish theme. As a result, there are no fundamental works, academic journals, encyclopedias, or state museums dedicated to the history of Belarusian Jews. The Jewish history in Belarus remains the purview of a few scholars and this trend should be changed.

Third, Jewish history is very instructive. Over generations, it was one of the most discriminated communities of a wider region, significantly limited in its rights and freedoms by the Russian imperial authorities. Belarusian Jews offer examples of adaptation in the use of limited opportunities under significant restrictions imposed by the state. Thus, over the 19th – early 20th centuries, Jews played a dominant role in the development of the numerous sectors of the Belarusian economy and formed the majority of the local business elites.

Fourth, for most of its existence, our journal has barely covered Jewish-related issues. This situation changed significantly in 2010 when our journal maintained fruitful cooperation with Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky and Professor Zakhar Shybeka from the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at the University of Tel Aviv. Their regular contributions on the various topics of the history of Belarusian Jews clearly demonstrated the perspectives of this work.

Thus, this special Jewish issue of *Belarusian Review* not only became largely possible thanks to these two scholars, but is also a logical manifestation of this cooperation potential. For more than 20 years Dr. Smilovitsky in Israel has explored the history of Belarusian Jews. Professor Shybeka joined him five years ago. Dr. Smilovitsky is known for his numerous works on the history of Jewish *shtetls*, the Holocaust, the partisan movement, and the history of censorship in Belarus. Professor Shybeka currently focuses on the history of Jews in

Minsk, the history of retail business in Belarus, and the role of Jews in the economic life of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 2013, Professor Shybeka initiated the section *Urban Life and the Jewish Community in Central and Eastern Europe* at the Third Congress of Belarusian Studies that took place in Kaunas (Lithuania) in October 2013. The contents of these issues include, but are not limited to, the best academic contributions to this section.

The examples of these two Belarus-born scholars, Dr. Smilovitsky and Professor Shybeka, demonstrate that it is possible to qualitatively contribute to Belarusian studies from abroad. Moreover, the interest in the history of Belarus has given them new impetus in their work and brought the depth of their discourse to new levels. This once again demonstrates what scientific results can be achieved by scholars when their creative potential is not artificially constrained.

The editorial board of *Belarusian Review* assumes its role to gather the experiences and the creative potential of scholars (particularly historians) focused on the various aspects of Belarusian studies. Their work provides a foundation for new academic research as well as provides explorations of the country's history in a more inclusive, truthful, and lively manner. Leonid Smilovitsky and Zakhar Shybeka offer their vision of the development of Belarusian Jewish Studies in their conceptual article *Jewish studies in Belarus: history, current state, and perspectives*, which opens this special edition of *Belarusian Review*.

This article is followed by a text *"Ours" or "foreign"? The attitude of Belarusians toward Jews in the beginning of the 20th century* by Ina Sorkina, where she examines how Jews were seen by Belarusians in early 20th century during the rise of the Belarusian national movement. The following three articles focus on the various aspects of economic history and the role of members of the Jewish community. It begins with the text *Jewish agricultural colonies of Belarus and Ukraine in the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries* by the late Volodymyr Goncharov. The author *inter alia* argues that Jews acquired the skills which have contributed to the successful development of agriculture in what later became the State of Israel. Andrei Kishtymov in his article *Jews in the economy of Belarus in the 19th – early 20th centuries: economic realities and public reaction* shows that the Jewish businesses had positive impact on the development of the Belarusian economy at that time. The text *Jewish trade in Belarus between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 20th centuries* by Emmanuil Ioffe describes the peculiarities of the Jewish trade. In her article *Mobility as a phenomenon of Jewish culture in the Belarusian part of Jewish Pale of Settlement from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century* Olga Sobolevskaya analyses the phenomenon of the Jewish community's mobility and the reactions it produced from the Russian imperial authorities. Two following articles are examples of microhistorical investigation. The text *A Belarusian who did not fail his humanity* by Zina Gimpelevich is dedicated to Georgii Musevič. In his memoirs Musevič depicted the destruction of traditional Jewish life in the western parts of today's Brest region, as well as showed how the memories of the Holocaust were disallowed by local authorities. The text *Jewish Photographers of the Mahilioŭ region in the 20th century* by Alexander Litin describes the story of the school of photography in the third-largest Belarusian city, which was dominated by Jewish artists and became quite renowned during Soviet times. The article *The Holocaust tragedy in the oral history of Belarusians* by Aleksander Smalianchuk is a result of numerous oral history expeditions conducted in different regions of Belarus. The last article of the issue *Memory of the Holocaust and the Jewish identity in Belarus after 1991* by Aliaksei Bratachkin is based on a study conducted with the support of the Center for Advanced Studies and Education (CASE) at the European Humanities University (EHU) in 2012-2013 and provides an analysis of the various contexts of Holocaust memory in today's Belarus and its linkage with Jewish identity.

One more aspect, which requires special attention is the transliteration we use in this issue. During the 20th century, the borders on the territory of today's Belarus changed several times. The language policies on this territory also varied significantly. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the method of transliteration of Belarusian geographical names considerably differs from one scientific publication in English to another, depending on the author's preferences and the period covered. Therefore, in order to bring these different approaches into conformity, we combined two important factors: the official status of the languages at the time described in the article and current Belarusian legislation on the transliteration of geographical names.[3] Thus, within the context of the Russian Empire (1795-1917) the geographical names are transliterated from Russian, while within the context of the interwar Polish state (1919-1939) which incorporated western territories of today's Belarus, Polish variants are

used. In all other cases, the geographical names are provided in their Belarusian variant according to the standards established by Belarusian domestic legal provisions and recommended by the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names to serve as the international system for the romanization of Belarusian geographical names. Because of this approach, one text can contain two or even three different variants of the same name in different languages depending on the period described (for example: Novogrudok – Nowogródek – Navahrudak). As Timothy Snyder observed, there "is a difference between history and memory, a difference revealed by a careful study of names."[4] However, to make it even more clear for the reader, a special Gazetteer is provided. It contains the list of Belarus-related geographical names mentioned in the issue in four languages which historically enjoyed official status on the Belarusian lands throughout different periods of the 20th century – Belarusian, Polish, Russian and Yiddish. As for personal names, no unanimous approach was used. The choice for a certain variant was determined by the author's preferences, historical context, and the ethnic affiliation of the person. While offering this issue for a wider international audience, the team of authors and editors acknowledges that it is responsible for errors of any kind which could remain in the issue.

At its initial stage, this project was generously supported by our long term editor-in-chief George Stankevich, who passed away in August 2014. In addition to his enthusiasm and devotion in promoting knowledge about Belarus and its culture, George was always open to people of different nations and cultures. This special issue of *Belarusian Review* is dedicated to his memory. Moreover, without diminishing other contributors' role, the editorial board would like to express our gratitude to George's brother Walter and daughter Jana for their valuable contribution to the preparation of this special issue.

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Jewish studies in Belarus: history, current state, and perspectives

Leonid Smilovitsky and Zakhar Shybeka

In this article the necessity of studying the Belarusian Jewish Studies has been justified and its contents were defined. As the basis of this study served the bibliography composed in the last 20 years by Leonid Smilovitsky and supplemented by Zakhar Shybeka. Conditions, achievements and peculiarities of the Belarusian Jewish Studies were defined since its emergence in the middle of the 19th century until present. Following stages of development are distinguished: the pre-Soviet (before 1917), period of the Belarusian Democratic Republic and the struggle for an independent Belarus (1918-1921), period of Soviet liberalization of the 1920s, the interwar Soviet period (1921-1941), the war-time period (1941-1945), the postwar period (1945-1991), the Republic of Belarus period (1991-). The most and the least developed topics are depicted. The authors concluded that the Belarusian Jewish Studies, as a separate dimension of the Belarusian historiography, acquired its initial shape in the beginning of the new 21st century. Reasons for its relative lagging in comparison with other countries were shown. The article ends with an analysis of further perspectives of Jewish Studies in the Republic of Belarus.

Introduction

Following the example of other countries, Belarusian Jewish Studies should be distinguished from general Jewish Studies. This also applies to the studies of the period of 1795-1917 when Belarusian statehood did not exist. Thus, Belarusian regional Jewish Studies should be distinguished from Russian (1772-1917), Polish (1921-1939) and Soviet (1917-1991) Jewish Studies. Without this distinction, it is impossible to understand the role of Jews in Belarusian history, the inclusion of Belarusian Jews in the context of Belarusian historiography, and the attention of Belarusian regional peculiarities within the general history of Jews.

What are the parameters of Belarusian Jewish Studies? Within its framework the Jews of Belarus are studied by all scientists regardless of their origin or residence. It also refers to the studies of any Jewish-related issues, which are pursued by the Belarusian citizens. Accordingly, Belarusian Jewish studies consist of domestic and foreign. Works published in Belarus by Jewish and other authors prior to or after their emigration belong to domestic Belarusian Jewish studies, whereas works published by them outside Belarus after emigration contribute to foreign Belarusian Jewish Studies.

The proposed division of the Belarusian Jewish Studies is conditional. Jews are dispersed throughout the world. They cannot be privatized and divided between individual countries of residence. Therefore, Belarusian Jewish Studies will always be a regional branch of general Jewish Studies. From the 1880s to the present time Belarusian Jews were studied by Jews from Belarus and Israel, as well as by Belarusian, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, German, American and English scholars. There is a large bibliography on Belarusian Jews produced outside Belarus. Thus, foreign Belarusian Jewish Studies represent a very important and specific topic which requires special research.[1]

Since the early 1990s a large electronic resource on Jewish issues has been gathered, and internet resources are becoming an integral part of the bibliography. Volf Rubinchyk devoted a special article to this trend.[2] Due to the limited space of this publication, we can only note some of these initiatives. For the publication of data on Belarusian Jews, the internet is widely used by Mark Bernstein, who is one of the leading Russian-language Wikipedia editors, Arkady Shulman, editor-in-chief of the journal “Mishpoha”, Vadim Akopyan, director of the Minsk-based public museum of history and culture of Jews in Belarus.

This article is devoted to the study of the domestic historiography of Belarusian Jewish Studies. For its preparation we used printed books and journal articles devoted to the history of the Belarusian Jewry. The list of these publications was composed by Zakhar Shybeka who used a database of the the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at Tel Aviv University, created by Leonid Smilovitsky for more than 20 years.

Various aspects of the Belarusian Jewish Studies were covered by historians Aleksei Bratochkin[3], Ina Herasimava[4], Emmanuil Ioffe[5], Evgeni Rozenblat[6], Volf Rubinchyk, Leonid Smilovitsky[7], Olga Sobolevskaya[8], Ina Sorkina[9], Dzmitry Shavialiou[10]. However, there is a need to revisit the topic.

Period of the Russian Empire

Belarusian Jewish Studies began to emerge in the middle of the 19th century in the heart of Russian Jewish Studies and developed as a regional area of study. Belarusian Studies were brought about by the overall Jewish emancipation and subsequent emergence of the Russian-Jewish press. This was determined by the attempts of the czarist authorities to russify the Jewish population of the empire in order to ease its integration into the Russian society.

The first book on the Jews of Belarus was published in 1870. Its author, Nikolai Gortynsky, a Mohilev official, who tried to prove that Jews were allegedly a danger for the Russian state.[11] The first scientific book on Belarusian Jews was prepared by professor Sergei Bershadsky from the Saint Petersburg university. In the 1880s he started publishing archival documents related to Jews and prepared a monograph on the legal status of Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[12]

Anti-Jewish pogroms of 1881-1882 gave new impetus to the study of Jewish history pursued mostly by Jews. At the end of the 19th century a Jewish historical scientific school was formed with the center in Saint Petersburg. Its key figure was Semyon Dubnov. The representatives of this school established a tradition of calling the Jews of the Pale of Settlement (the territories of "today's Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania) "Russian Jews" (Russian: *russkie evrei*), and not Jews of the Russian state (Russian: *rossiyskie evrei*). Actually, the presence of Jews in the ethnic Russian provinces of the Empire was very marginal due to the continuous discriminatory policies of the tsarist authorities. In this regard, it is profound that "The history of Jews in Russia" published in 1914 by Yuli Hessen was almost entirely based on the documents from Belarus and Lithuania, where local Jews called themselves Litvaks. Incidentally, the term "Russian Jews" was linked with Russian citizenship and determined by the engagement of Jewish elites in Russian culture. This fact is important to consider while dealing with the bibliography of the Belarusian Jewish Studies.

Period of 1918-1921

Already the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) contributed to the promotion of Jewish Studies in Belarus. Under its wing, Zmitrok Biadulia (Samuil Plaŭnik) published in 1918 in Minsk his book *Jews in Belarus: everyday traits*. For the first time Belarusian Jews were defined as a specific subject of research.

Period of Soviet liberalization of the 1920s

In the 1920s, the creators of the popular-democratic concept of the history of Belarus (Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski, Usievalad Ihnatoŭski, Mitrafan Doŭnar-Zapoĺski) focused on the idea of ethnocentrism. The most important task was to prove the legitimacy of Belarusian statehood. Therefore, Jewish issues were not touched by them. Jewish historians grouped mainly around the Jewish section of the Institute of Belarusian Culture (*Inbielkuĺt*), reorganized in 1929 into the Academy of Sciences of the Belarusian SSR. The efforts of Jewish historians were embodied in the form of an academic journal *Tsaytshrift* (Belarusianized: *Cajtšryft*) published in 1926-32 in Yiddish.

Already in 1926 Samuil Agursky published the first book in the Belarusian SSR devoted to the Jews and the history of the Jewish revolutionary movement in Belarus.[13] Communist censorship allowed publications which mainly dealt with the participation of Jews in the revolutionary movement, condemnation of Antisemitism, the modernization of Jewish life in towns and boroughs, and on the pre-Bolshevik period (publications by Izrail Sosis). In the interwar period, an entire galaxy of Jewish Soviet writers was formed. Hirsh Reles, who was one of them, paid tribute to his fellow colleagues in his memoirs.[14]

Period of suppression of the role of Jews in the history of Belarus (1932-1991)

This era consists of different stages, which include the pre-war, the war-time, and the post-war development of Jewish Studies in Belarus. However, all the stages are characterized by a number of common features. Until 1992 during this entire period the Jewish national topics were banned. The only exceptions were the criticism of Zionism and the condemnation of the adherents of the Bund (Yiddish: *Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland*). However, after Stalin's death in 1953 specialists on Jewish Studies were allowed within the scope of Middle Eastern Studies to deal with the Biblical Studies and ancient texts in Hebrew. The normative research focused on Jews was scarcely held in the Belarusian SSR (Biblical scholar Mikalai Nikolski and historian and philosopher Giler Livshits). It is obvious that the experts in Jewish Studies had to write their works in compliance with foundations of the class struggle and atheism.

The Bolshevik dictate the Bolsheviks could not completely remove the Jews from the works on the history of Belarus. Belarusian historian of the revolutionary movement Michaś Bič as

well as urbanists Sciapan Shcharbakou, Zinoviy Kopysski, Efraim Korpachev, Anatoĺ Hryckievič wrote about Jews, although sometimes without mentioning the name.

Negative attitude of the Communist authorities towards Jewish Studies could be primarily explained by ideological attitudes. Communist principles left no room for national movements and religious feelings. Strengthening of national identity did not comply with the accelerated line of the Kremlin to merge all nations into a single Soviet people. Paradoxically, the tradition of Antisemitism inherited by the Communists from the tsarist rule was among the reasons for that. Stalin and his entourage remembered Jewish nationalism of the old days and therefore they feared even a relatively small number of Holocaust survivors. Like Belarusians, the post-war Jews were Russified and Sovietised to a greater extent than other peoples of the Soviet Union. There were no specific Belarusian reasons for suppressing the role of Jews. The situation of Antisemitism of the Belarusian SSR officials emerged mainly due to obedience and dependence of the local authorities on Moscow.

The Republic of Belarus period (1991-)

After the collapse of the USSR the Jewish Studies have become more attractive. It became impossible and actually not necessary to ignore Jewish issues. The topic generated much interest, like everything else which had previously been forbidden. By no means unimportant was the fact that those scholars who deal with Jewish issues got opportunities to receive grants, publish books and articles in academic journals, and participate in scientific conferences. Materials about Jews are constantly published in all periodicals. Professor Emmanuil Ioffe was the first who demonstrated an integrated approach to the study of the history of Jews in Belarus.[15] Aron Skir in his book highlighted a general concept of the spiritual culture of the Belarusian Jews in Belarus.[16]

It seemed that independence would allow for the indication of the place of Jews in Belarusian history. However, like 70 years ago the main task of Belarusian historians was the legitimization of the Belarusian statehood. Nonetheless, in an informal national concept of history, Jews were referred to much more often than during the Soviet rule. The official pro-Russian concept of history mentioned only the Nazi genocide against the Jewish people during the Second World War. Then, in the 1990s, the myth of purity of the Belarusians from participation in pogroms and the Holocaust emerged.

The Belarusian government has funded only one three-year research project *The Nazi policies of genocide against the Jewish population of Belarus in 1941-1944* (conducted in 1995-1997 and lead by Emmanuil Ioffe). However, having received international support at the turn of the 2000s the Belarusian Jewish Studies experienced the heyday in terms of the number of publications that emerged on the basis of the previously collected materials. The first books about the history of Jews in Belarus were mainly of popular scientific nature. Among recent publications in the field of the domestic Jewish Studies the scientific monographs by Leonid Smilovitsky, Yakov Basin and Olga Sobolevskaya can be distinguished.[17]

The Minsk History Workshop, a joint Belarusian and German initiative lead by Kuzma Kozak, published memoirs of the Belarusian Jews who survived in the Great War and materials of the scientific and practical conference dedicated to the Holocaust. In 1997-2001 a yearbook *The Jews of Belarus. History and Culture* edited by Ina Herasimava was published. A great contribution to the collection and publication of materials about the Jews of the Mahilioŭ region was made by Alexander Litin.

A specific category of the Belarusian Jewish Studies was founded by Arkady Shulman, head of the project *Voices of Jewish boroughs. Viciebsk region.* Obsessed with the noble aim to preserve the memories of the Jewish *shtetl* for the future generations, he writes books about the individual towns and boroughs of the Viciebsk region based on memories of their natives. These books are published at least once a year.

A new dimension of Belarusian Jewish Studies is represented by the study of ancient and modern history of Israel (Emmanuil Ioffe, Dzmitry Shavialiou, Maryna Shavialiova, Pinkhas Palonski, Dzmitry Mazarchuk).The scholars dealing with Jewish history in Belarus did not omit sport, rather rare but interesting topic.[18]

The number of defended scientific theses may serve a qualitative indicator of any scientific discipline. During the independence period (1991-2014) 16 doctoral theses on Jewish subjects were defended. Two of them were dedicated to the ancient time, seven – the period of the Russian Empire, one – the interwar period, four – World War II, and two – modern Israel. Dissertators focused on the life of Belarusian Jewish communities (five theses), the Holocaust in Belarus (four), the history of Jews in the land of their ancestors (four), revolutionary and national movement under the domination of the Russian emperors (three).

It turned out that there existed a mutual interest of Jewish and Belarusian authors in the history of the peoples living side by side. Ina Herasimava started to investigate the participation of Jews in the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR). A book by Leonid Smilovitsky book was entitled *Jews of Belarus: From Our Common History 1905-1953* which reveals appropriate approach. Belarusian publications devoted to the Jews of Belarus special issues (*Naša Niva*, No.33 (1999); *ARCHE-Pačatak*, No.3 (2000). Belarusian independent publishing house "Technalohija" published a book by Hirsh Smolar on the Minsk ghetto (2002). The author wrote it in the absence of censorship in Israel. The first attempt to assess Jewish culture in the context of the Belarusian history was made by Professor Leanid Lyč in his short monograph.[19] Since 2011, an annual journal *Cajtšryft* is published (editor-in-chief Dzmitry Shavialiou). It inherited the name and themes of the prewar edition. Its third volume (2013) is characterized by a good scientific level. This suggests that it may take an important place in the Belarusian Jewish Studies. Publications in an authoritative journal *ARCHE* also have significant scientific value. The editorial board of this journal managed to attract a wide range of authors: historians, linguists, anthropologists, philosophers from Belarus and foreign countries. It made possible to create a representative image of the Jewish life in Belarus.

Certain contribution to the study of the history of Jews in Belarus was made by the employees of various local history museums throughout the country. Mostly focused on the Holocaust, the Jewish theme is present in museums Červień, Dziatlava, Iŭje, Smilavičy, Navahrudak, Mir, or Horki. Tamara Viarshytskaya, director of the Navahrudak Historical Museum, was a pioneer in this matter. Yad Vashem, the Museum of the Holocaust and Heroism, in 2011 and 2014 organized relevant seminars in Jerusalem for the museum staff from Belarus.

The Holocaust, the most painful issue for Jews, was the most extensively studied area in independent Belarus (Marat Batvinnik, Emmanuil Ioffe, Evgeni Rozenblat, Raisa Charnahlazava, Danila Ramanouski, Kuzma Kozak, etc.). By the way, there is the consensus among all Belarusian historians for the need to research this topic. The most valuable are the publications of the documents and memories on the Holocaust.[20] Their identification and the publication became possible thanks to the support and direct involvement of Viachaslau Seliameneu, director of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus. The study of the Holocaust continues, more and more new facts and eyewitness accounts are discovered.[21]

The Holocaust theme is followed by the topic of Jewish life and Jewish sites in the cities and towns of Belarus (Arkady Shulman, Vladimir Livshits, Alexander Rosenberg, etc.). This is likely linked with the expected tourism purposes. The third place in this ranking belongs to the personality of Marc Chagall and biographies of other prominent Jewish personalities (Arkadz Padlipski, Ludmila Khmialnitskaya, etc.).

The pre-Soviet and interwar (1921-1939) history of Belarusian Jews also attracted many researchers (Yauhen Anishchanka, Olga Sobolevskaya, Yakov Basin, Ina Herasimava, Dmitry Slepovitch, Leanid Zubarau, etc.). It is important to note that many historians of Jewish origin have successfully worked in the area of the Belarusian Jewish Studies on their own initiative (Yauhen Anishchanka, Andrei Zamoyski, Eduard Savitski, Olga Sobolevskaya, Julia Funk, Ludmila Khmialnitskaya, Ina Sorkina, Aliaksandr Lakotka, Leanid Lyč, Kuzma Kozak, Andrei Kishtymov, etc.).

The development of Jewish Studies in an independent Belarus requires a more detailed study. This development can, thus, be divided into four phases:

- revival of Jewish Studies (1991-1996);
- burst of predominantly popular scientific publications (1997-2003);
- publications became distinguished for their scientific approach (2004-2010);
- relative recession of Belarusian Jewish Studies (approximately nine publications appeared annually while in previous years this number reached 13).

Most likely, this slight decline is linked with the completion of a certain stage in the study of Jews in Belarus. The need for the accumulation of new facts and their rethinking by a new generation of researchers emerged. In order to bring together scholars working on Belarusian Jewish studies, including foreign researchers, the authors of this article have developed a project at the Institute of History of Belarusian Jews under the auspices of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at Tel Aviv University, where they work. Preparation of this special Jewish issue of the *Belarusian Review* is the result of a successful cooperative effort by the initiative group with

its editor-in-chief Kiryl Kascian and the generous support of the former editor-in-chief of the quarterly, the late George Stankevich.

Conclusion

These materials give grounds to assert the existence of the Belarusian Jewish Studies as a separate category of Belarusian historiography formed in the beginning of the 21st century. However, in comparison with the neighboring countries scholars dealing with history of Belarus still pay insufficient attention to the Jews. Jewish Studies has not yet become a fully fledged academic subject area in Belarus. The reasons are:

- After the collapse of the USSR the tradition to consider the history of Jews as part of the Belarusian history is yet to establish itself in the independent Belarus.
- Belarusian Jewish Studies are not supported in the academic structures of the country.
- Jewish national issues are considered sensitive and non-Jewish scholars are afraid to address it.
- Continued distancing from Russia and Poland encourages Belarusian historians to maintain their ethnocentric approach.
- Belarusian Studies are limited by the lack of knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew.
- Antisemitism and ignorance of the real life of Jews in Belarus should be noted.

Perspectives

It is important to include three important components for further development of Belarusian Jewish Studies.

- Jewish Studies should be pursued not only by Jews but also by Belarusians, who should first unite, organize and outline new plans. Jewish Studies should focus not on a Jewish, but mainly on a Belarusian reader, because the aging and decreasing Jewish population, as a result of emigration, leads to the fact that there is no one else but Belarusians who should read and write about the history of Jews.
- Jewish Studies should take its rightful place in Belarusian historiography. Belarusians are the successors of the historical and cultural heritage of the people, who as a result of the Holocaust and forced mass emigration, dropped out of Belarusian society.
- Following the examples of other countries, a single point of Belarusian Jewish Studies should be established to coordinate research activities. It is important to use the example of other countries, and establish a single point for Belarusian Jewish Studies. Created in 2010, at the European Humanities University, the Center for Jewish History and Culture of Belarus has not yet been organized.

Prospective direction of Belarusian Jewish Studies, for example, could be:

- study of the attitudes of Belarusians towards the Holocaust,
- writing the histories of local Jewish communities,
- study of the contribution of natives of Belarus in Jewish civilization,
- study of the Jewish press in Yiddish (the Belarusian SSR was the only country in the world where Yiddish was the official language),
- publication of sources and works of foreign authors,
- a more detailed study of the national movement and national characteristics of the Jews,
- scientific and artistic interpretation of the experience of the Belarusian-Jewish coexistence in the past, and
- writing the history of Jews in Belarus.

The transformation of the Belarusian Jewish Studies into a separate category of Belarusian historiography provides the basis to allot special sections in all libraries of Belarus devoted to Jewish Studies. The National Library of Belarus could have created a separate department of the Belarusian Jewish Studies and gather there all editions on Jews in Belarus, including books, magazines and newspapers in Yiddish. It is possible that the Jewish issue will be developed in the literature. There were a lot of intrigues, adventures and dramatic moments in Belarusian-Jewish relations. Belarusian writers have not yet taken advantage of such a wealth of stories. The Litvak Jews are dispersed worldwide. They occupied an important place in the history of Belarus, Europe and international Zionism. This provides experts in the field of the Belarusian Jewish Studies long-term perspectives for the maintenance and development of international scientific cooperation.

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"Ours" or "foreign"? The attitude of Belarusians toward Jews in the beginning of the 20th century

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This article, based on centuries-old traditions of Jewish-Belarusian interethnic contacts, is devoted to the relations between Belarusians and Jews during the rise of the Belarusian national movement in early 20th century. The article provides examples of the influence of Jews on the development of Belarusian national revival. The author analyzes materials published in Belarusian newspaper Naša Niva (1906-1915). The article demonstrates how the newspaper sharply condemned Antisemitism, gives an objective picture of the legal and economic situation of Jews in Belarus and Lithuania. The editors and correspondents of the newspaper characterized the Belarusian Jews as "our own". The leaders of the Belarusian national movement regarded the Jews as an integral part of the ethnic and cultural landscape of Belarus, and as allies in the political struggle against the Tsarist regime. The state-promoted Antisemitism of the Russian Empire had a minimal following among the Belarusians. The relationships between Belarusians and Jews were characterized by a fairly high degree of tolerance, and can be best described by the formula "other our".

Introduction

Belarusians and Jews were the most numerous people of the multiethnic Belarusian-Lithuanian region of the Russian Empire. According to the 1897 official census data in five provinces (Vilna, Vitebsk, Grodna, Mohilev, Minsk) lived 5,408,420 Belarusians (63.5%), 1,202,129 Jews (14.1%), 492,921 Russians (5.8%), 424,236 Poles (5%), 377,487 Ukrainians (4.4%), 288,921 Lithuanians (3.4%), 272,775 Latvians (3.2%), 27,311 Germans (3.3%), 8,448 Tatars (0.1%), and 19,658 people of other nationalities.[1]

Jews represented the second highest number after the Belarusians, among the peoples who lived on the territory of Belarus. Within the urban population, Jews were the largest group. For example, in the Grodna province, their share exceeded 58% in cities and towns.[2] Russians were a small, although an aggressive minority, enjoying the support of the powerful imperial state. The Russian authorities, however, did not officially recognize the existence of such a national mosaic.

According to the official version, Belarusians and Jews were not nations. Belarusian language was considered an offshoot of the Russian Language, and the "jargon" spoken by the Jews was to be supplanted by the Russian language. Belarusians were considered a part of the Great Russian nation (as were the Ukrainians). Jews were treated by the Tsarist government as "future" or "potential" Russians.

As the various national movements grew in the region, the authorities fomented antisemitic sentiments. The fueling of confrontation between the various peoples of the Belarusian-Lithuanian region became one of the cards in the Macchiavelian game played by the Imperial government.

What was the reaction of Belarusians to state-promoted Antisemitism? Did the government reach its aim of instigating Belarusian-Jewish conflict? Answers to these questions can be found in *Naša Niva* – the weekly socio-political, scientific, educational and literary newspaper, which was published in Belarusian in Vilna from November 1906 until August 1915. *Naša Niva* followed *Naša Dolia*, an officially permitted Belarusian weekly at the beginning of the 20th century. It played a key role in the development of Belarusian national and cultural revival.

For this study, it is important to examine, first – the editorials on the topic of Jews, and second – the correspondence on this subject coming from a variety of places and published in the section "From Belarus and Lithuania." These materials provide a sufficiently detailed overview of inter-ethnic relations in the early 20th century and show the attitude of the leadership of the Belarusian national movement to the so-called "Jewish question."

The traditions of the Belarusian-Jewish relations in Belarus

By the early 20th century, the Belarusians and Jews had already centuries-old experience of cohabitation in the same social, economic and cultural space - especially in the cities. When did the Jews start to appear in Belarusian towns?

The written sources have information about Jews settling there at the end of the 16th century. At first, their number was small and limited to one or more persons, such as innkeepers. However,

the many devastating wars, which began in the middle of the 17th century, brought the Belarusian urban population to the edge of economic and demographic disaste

Particularly tragic was the war between Russia and the Commonwealth of Both Nations in 1654 - 1667, after which only 45% of Belarusian urban population survived.[3] Afterwards, the Jewish population filled some of the vacuum. In the 18th century the number of Jews in the cities and towns increased significantly and they made up a large part of the urban population.

The final crystallization of the socio-cultural model of the town took place after the partitions of the Commonwealth. These settlements were composed of mostly Jewish population as a result of forced eviction of Jews from the countryside. The ban on Jews living or conducting business in villages remained in force for nearly the entire period of Belarus' existence within the Russian Empire.

Thus, during 18-19th centuries, Belarus became a land of Jewish settlements, which were organized by the community with their traditional institutions regulating the daily community life. Russia's demographic decrees have led to the concentration of Jews in towns and cities, leading to the conservation of Jewish culture and way of life.

The small town for the Jews played the same role, as did the village for the Belarusians. It became for the Jews their own "habitat." Gradually, the small town (in Belarusian: *miastečka,* in Yiddish: *shtetl*) came to be viewed as a small Jewish homeland, as "Israel in exile." As a result, it became the core of Jewish history in the region and cultural creativity of Belarusian Jewry.

The study of inter-ethnic relations in the small towns of Belarus shows them to be varied. There have been manifestations of all types of relations: friendly, neutral, rough, hostile. Their amplitude ranged between the poles of benevolence, tolerance, cooperation, intercultural dialogue -- as well as, isolationism, intolerance, suspicion, alienation and even hostility. Still, the negative pole of inter-ethnic relations was rarely approached in Belarusian towns. Despite the existing conditions of such an intolerant country, that was the Russian Empire, small towns demonstrated a preservation of local traditions of religious tolerance and constructive multi-ethnicity.[4]

Being in constant contact with the Christian population, the Jews could not avoid being influenced. Between the Jewish and Christian traditions developed a certain synthesis, certain interpenetration and mutual enrichment. Valery Dymshyts, an expert on Jewish folk tales and theater, states that in these areas the field of mutual influence between these traditions was quite wide. Boris Khaimovich, a researcher of Jewish monuments of plastic art, came to the conclusion that some of the models of the Christian world passed into the Jewish tradition. Alla Sokolova, a specialist in the shtetl architecture, notes that, despite its specificity and particularity, there was some borrowing, particularly in the field of construction technology. Zinovy Stolar, studying the music of the Jewish town, came to the conclusion that as evidence of Jewish life in a foreign environment appear the bilingual and polimotive songs and instrumental music, which employ the folklore characteristics of different nations. The interaction between the musical cultures of Jews and Slavs in various aspects (melody, rhythm, genre, tools, manners of execution) was also studied by Dmitri Slepovitch. According to well-grounded conclusions of researchers, the openness of the Jewish musical tradition to the music influences of neighboring Slavs, can be affirmed.

The logical result of the coexistence of the two peoples was the mutual penetration of the Belarusian and Yiddish languages. Words like birds flew out from under one roof to under the other. Jews and Belarusians not only have learned to understand each other, but the mutual experience has led to the formation of a new vocabulary, references and expressions, proverbs and sayings, reflecting a whole spectrum of relations.

The standards and phonetics of the Belarusian language were used by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858 – 1922) from Luzhki and by Mendele Mocher Sforim (1835 - 1917) from Kopyl in the resurrection of Hebrew, in order to give its book version a spoken version, and to breathe new life into it.[5] The autonomy and the isolation of the Jewish culture were, therefore, not absolute. Interpenetration and mutual enrichment between it and the Christian culture were quite evident. The small town was the meeting place, and an intersection of these two different traditions.

At the heart of the interaction of ethnic groups living in small towns, were the inevitable economic interests. A study of the economic development of the small towns of Belarus allows one to notice a paradoxical combination of the hard daily struggle for existence in pervasive poverty and in unique atmosphere of quite friendly and trusting relationships. It was clearly illustrated in

the memoirs of publicist and pedagogue Abram Paperna (1840 – 1919):

> Kopyl had a population of about 3,000, consisting of three different ethnic groups and religions: Jews, Belarusians and Tatars. These three groups, united by being on common territory and having a common ruling class, were strangers to each other in language, customs, faiths and historical legends. They were in appearance and in spirit, representatives of three different worlds, but still lived together in peace. The inevitable neighborly and economic interests brought them closer. There was no jealousy between them, they all had difficulties in securing livelihood, and most importantly, there was no competition between them, since each of these groups, as if by agreement, determined its separate activity, each complementing the others, rather than engaging in competition.[6]

The professional structure of the small town Jewish population was so designed, that non-Jews could not do without business contacts with Jews. Some professions in the town were represented mainly by Jews (e.g, physicians, pharmacists, medical personnel, hairdressers, coachmen). The familiarity with the urban life, the knowledge of economic realities, business and personal communications, entrepreneurship, made the Jews a necessary link in the ful-fledged economic functioning of the small towns of the Belarusian region. Writer Zmitrok Biadulia justifiably remarked:

> The proximity of these two nations [Jews and Belarusians – BR] created such living conditions and economic relations, in which one nation could not do without the other.[7]

Thus, according to the Paperna memoir, Jewish merchants and Belarusian weavers in Kopyl worked in tandem:

> Belarusian burghers, responding to the orders of the local Jewish merchants, wove linen and the thin white coverlets, which were used at the time by Jewish women, as part of the headdress. Jews provided the raw material, paid for the work performed on a weekly basis, and sold the finished product at the market in Zelva.[8]

According to Belarusian folk art expert Yauhen Sakhuta, the best makers of the painted chests, popular among Belarusians, were Jews who were attuned to the cultural needs of the community, where they lived.[9] The inhabitants of Mir declare that "our people have learned from the Jews how to build wagons and coaches."[10]

Economic and cultural interactions led to the joint political struggle. Professor Zakhar Shybeka gives many examples of the joint struggle of Jews and Belarusians for their rights in Tsarist Russia.[11] Some representatives of the Jewish people were featured in the history of the Belarusian national movement. A native of Shklov, Israel (Khaim) Ratner, one of the leaders of the Belarusian faction of "Narodnaya Volya" (The People's Will) in Saint Petersburg, participated in publishing the magazine *Homon* (1884), on whose pages the first attempt was made to scientifically prove the existence of Belarusians as a nation.[12]

Ethnographic and philological materials about Belarusians began to appear in the 1880s in the official press, including in the newspaper *Minsky Listok*, published after 1886. Among the researchers of the Belarusian nation was the ethnograher Pavel Shein (1826-1900), a Jew, born in Mohilev, and baptized in the Lutheran Church. He was considered an outstanding expert on the customs and language of Belarusians.[13]

In the national-cultural revival of Belarus at the beginning of the 20th century, a significant role was played by the Belarusian writer of Jewish heritage Zmitrok Biadulia (Samuil Plaunik) (1886-1941), a native of the town Posadets in Vileika county. One of the leaders of the Belarusian movement Anton Luckievič, who characterized Biadulia as "our" Jew, wrote:

> The Poles, Russians and many other nationalities can truly boast of the literary achievements of "their" Jews. Belarusians are not the exception in this regard: Jews appeared in Belarus as well, and having become so close to our people that they devoted their creativity to work on the revival of Belarusian culture. The first place among them is held by our bard, who hides under an assumed name: Zmitrok Biadulia.[14]

The editor and publisher of the first officially permitted Belarusian newspaper *Naša Dolia* (the first issue was published September 1, 1906) was a baptized Jewish Vilna burgher Jan Tukerkes. He also financed the newspaper. In January 1907 the Vilna Judicial Chamber banned the publication of *Naša Dolia*. Tukerkes was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. In order to avoid serving the sentence, Tukerkes fled to Paris. There is evidence that in 1936 he applied to the Vilna archive (then as Wilno, a part of the Polish state) with the request to send him a copy of the trial record and of the sentencing. His further fate is unknown. Anton Luckievič in his memoirs calls him "a devotee of the fast life," who wasted the inheritance from his father.[15]

Representatives of Jewish parties and movements were active in the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, proclaimed in March 1918 (Moshe Gutman, Isaak Lurie, Samuil Zhitlovsky, and others).[16]

Emma Zalkind, an actress with the travelling Belarusian folk theater, founded in Wilno in 1927, got involved in the Belarusian national-cultural movement. In order to draw the attention of the Jewish intelligentsia to it, to its problems and needs, Zalkind staged an outlandish performance at the Exhibition of Jewish Wilno Printing. She appeared at the event wearing a skirt that was sewn entirely from the Wilno Belarusian newspapers and magazines. The further fate of Emma Zalkind was tragic. During the Second World War, Belarusian intelligentsia helped her to move to Navahrudak. However, that did not save her life. Emma Zalkind was arrested by the Germans and died in a Nazi concentration camp.[17]

To understand the above and similar examples of Belarusian-Jewish intellectual contacts of the late 19th, and the early decades of the 20th century, it is important to keep in mind the whole context of the centuries-old tradition of cooperation between the two nations on Belarusian lands. The traditions of tolerant relations between Belarusians and Jews, the absence of aggressive Antisemitism among the population have become a major factor in the relative scarcity of anti-Jewish pogroms in the Belarusian-Lithuanian region in the huge wave of anti-Jewish violence in the 1880s (7 cases among total number of 690 in the Pale of Settlement), and in October 1905 (23 cases detected among the 292 pogroms throughout the territory of the Pale of Settlement).[18]

Besides, the source of anti-Jewish aggression, both the initial and major pogrom impetus came not from the masses of the Belarusian population. The organizers of the pogroms were members of the local Russian administration, first of all – gendarmerie and police structures. The number and severity of massacres were directly dependent on the stand of the provincial authorities. Pogroms became a way to counter the revolutionary movement, which was considered by the local administration to be a revolt of Jews against Russia.[19]

Belarusian-Jewish relations on the pages of *Naša Niva* (1906 – 1915)

An important source for the study of the relationship between the representatives of the Belarusian and Jewish peoples in the early 20th century is the newspaper *Naša Niva*.

An important documentary evidence of the circulation of the newspaper is the appeal of its editors to the leadership of the Polish Socialist Party in London on 21 January 1907 for a loan of 1,000 rubles. Circulation at the time was five thousand copies (of which three thousand in "Russian" Cyrillic letters, and two thousand – "Polish" Latin letters). A large part of the each issue, amounting to 2,200 was distributed in the villages by agencies from the nearby small towns.[20]

Correspondence to *Naša Niva* from different places of the Belarusian-Lithuanian territory[21]

Province	Number of small towns	Number of letters to Naša Niva	Number of active participants of the Belarusian cultural movement from that province
Vilna	122	229	35
Minsk	111	208	34
Grodna	81	114	12
Mohilev	73	65	4
Vitebsk	29	27	4

It is likely that the distribution of the newspaper involved small town Jews: that of the agents referred to in the above document. This conclusion is evidenced by the comparative analysis of the statistics the number of towns and correspondence to the newspaper from different places of the Belarusian-Lithuanian territory, as well as the birth places of the active participants of the Belarusian cultural movement (see table above)

The above data shows that people from the provinces with the highest density of small towns, and hence with greater Jewish population, wrote more actively to *Naša Niva*. The majority of the activists of the Belarusian national and cultural movement of the late 19th – early 20th centuries were also born here. The process of formation of national identity among Belarusians was aided by the proximity to the "others", i.e. the Jews, who were a community with a distinct national consciousness, aware of their own interests and focused on their realiza-

tion. In view of the above circumstances, the influence of Jews on the development of Belarusian national revival is not in doubt.

Both the theoreticians and activists within the Belarusian national movement did pay attention to the "Jewish question". It was not unusual for the Belarusian Socialist Hramada to distribute leaflets in Yiddish during the revolution of 1905-1906.

Aleś Burbis, while organizing Belarusian trade unions in 1906 in Minsk, included the Jews as well.[22] In 1913, the Jewish literary magazine *Di yiddishe velt* (The Jewish World), published in Vilna, carried a long article by Anton Luckievič (pseud. Anton Navina) *Unzere shkhenim* (Our Neighbors), which contained the aims and objectives of the Belarusian revivalist movement, its attitude to the so-called "Jewish question" and the cause of the Jewish national liberation.[23] This demonstrated the mutual interest of both Belarusian and Jewish national leaders in cooperation in addressing the national issues of both peoples.

Acording to the Tel Aviv University professor Matityahu Mintz, the idea of turning Belarus into a common state of Jews and Belarusians, was discussed. The ormation of a binational Jewish-Belarusian state would counteract the political activity of Russians and Poles, who did not recognize the identity of Belarusians as a nation. All the Belarusian patriotic circles were familiar with this idea.[24]

During the whole period of *Naša Niva*'s publication, its pages carried materials related to the situation of the Jews and their mutual relations with Belarusians.

The Jewish theme was covered in these four large analytical articles: *Ab žydoch* (On the Jews), *Abmiežavanni ŭ zakonach dlia žydoŭ* (Restrictions in the law for the Jews), *Valasnoje ziemstva i žydy* (District authorities and the Jews) *Nacyjanaĺnaja palityka i handaĺ* (Nationality policy and trade) and a shorter article *Žydy i rekrutčyna* (Jews and conscription). These materials should be regarded as statements in defense of the Jews in the period of increased Antisemitism and its elevation to the rank of official state policy.

The article *Ab žydoch* (May 4, 1907) was dedicated to refuting the following stereotypes: "God Himself says to beat the Jews"; "Jews live not through the work of their hands, but through the labor of our people"; "All Jews are rich." The author (initialed "B.") conducts an argument with the pogrom leaders and the villains that pit Christians against Jews. The article claimed that those who learn to beat the Jews, while saying that their faith requires this, do not believe in God, do not know the Christian religion and are deceiving people. The author describes in detail the employment of Jews, analyzes their economic situation, thereby refuting the second and the third theses. Belarusians, the authors conclude, should not beat the Jews, but rather together with them should seek a better life, fortune and freedom.[25]

The same author did a review of the restrictive laws regarding Jews (such as the Pale of Settlement, that forbade for the Jews to settle in villages, to participate in community activities and municipal elections, to hold positions in public service, and to cause them to experience inflated recruitment rate, restrictions on admission to educational institutions, on owning property and finding work) and concluded that "the Jews among us have the least of the rights." The article ends with the condemnation of the "brutal and terrible" pogroms in recent years, due to which "our land has become even poorer, and was ruined by all sorts of misfortunes," and the call to recognize the Jews as human beings and rightful citizens of the state.[26]

The author of the two articles signed as B. could have been Zmitrok Biadulia. He later established a closer contact with the newspaper. His works and correspondence were often published. Starting in 1914, when the editor of the newspaper was Janka Kupala, Zmitrok Biadulia served as the executive secretary of the editorial board.

The newspaper printed a small article on February 15, 1908 by an unknown author about conscription, which gave statistics showing the elevated rate of Jewish recruitment. It also featured information about the courage of Jews and the awards received by them during the Russo-Japanese war.[27]

The newspaper's editor and publisher Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ wrote an article titled *Valasnoje ziemstva i žydy*. In it, he noted the significant role of the Jews in the development of trade, education and medical affairs. The author argued that Jews should not be restricted in their rights and should not be prevented from participation in the local government:

> Our Belarusian Jews with their greater enlightenment and practical wisdom would be very useful in the local authorities [*zemstvo* - BR]. And now, when we have no district authorities, the shtetl Jews hire

> doctors from which not only the Jews benefit... Now, many grammar schools and secondary schools are opening up in cities and towns, and while it's all organized by Jews, the Christians also study there. It turns out that the Jews among us, using their own initiative, undertake tasks that should be done by local authorities, city councils and the government. The Jews were the first among us to open small cooperative banks. In addition, it must be said that the Jews in public organizations will never steal and do not waste public money, as often happens around us.[28]

The author argued that ethnicity should not limit people's rights. The use of the term "our Belarusian Jews" suggests that the ideologists of the Belarusian national revival considered the Jews, despite the isolation of their way of life, an integral part of the cultural and religious space of Belarus.

The article *Nacyjanaĺnaja palityka i handaĺ*, written by Anton Luckievič (under the cryptonym H.B.), was devoted to the analysis of the role of the Jews in the development of trade, as well as the reasons for their monopolization of this kind of activity. The author argued:

> When the trade belongs to the Jews and the Christians can not even approach it, and it is not they who are guilty, rather it is the whole of our history and we ourselves.[29]

Speaking about the benefits of Jewish trade, while criticizing Stolypin's intention to restrict Jews' ability to get bank loans, Luckievič concluded that such a policy will not benefit our region.

Various aspects of the Jewish life of the Pale of Settlement are reflected in the correspondents' reports sent in from various areas of Belarus and Lithuania. According to the editors' estimates in the first three years of *Naša Niva*, its pages contained 906 reports from 489 villages and small towns. They were usually located in the section "From Belarus and Lithuania." The material was divided into information and analysis parts. The news reports predominated. Some correspondence not only conveyed information, but also contained the author's reasoning.

The materials in this column frequently reviewed the issue of the Belarusian national and cultural revival and political life, such as the elections to the Duma, the development of education, the fight against alcoholism, the creation of an elected local self-government, cooperative business entities. It illustrated the problem of interfaith relations between the Orthodox and Catholics, Jews and Christians. Often there was information about abuses of power by the authorities and police. There was data on the numbers and composition of the population, its financial situation, about taxes, information on trade and crafts, the external appearance of cities and towns, their sanitary conditions and healthcare. Significant space was devoted to crime news, reports of fires and epidemics.

The section "From Belarus and Lithuania", thus contains a variety of information about the political, socio-economic and cultural situation of the population, gives a fairly complete panorama of everyday life of cities and towns of Belarus and Lithuania of the early 20th century. Some of these materials reflect the difficult situation in the exacerbation of Jewish-Christian relations in the early 20th century, resulting from of the resurgehce of the Black Hundreds (members of the "Union of the Russian People"). Here are some typical examples: From the town of Gorodok in Belostok county came this report:

> In our small town live Jews and Christians. Until recently, they lived in harmony and peace, but now everything is disturbed. The "unionists" started coming to town and started persuading local Christians to sign up into the "Union of the Russian people," promising that for this they will be given land. Fifty people signed up... And this is how these "unionists" began to "work": after getting drunk, they went around town to look for secret taverns. They didn't find any, but proceeded to create disturbances throughout the town. They smashed windows in Jewish houses, as well as in those of Christians who did not join the "union". Instead of the land that was promised, only drunkenness and disorder got established.[30]

The correspondent from Radoshkovichi in Vileika county, using the alias Viecier [Wind – BR] reported that

> a man at the market called on people to beat the Jews, but the Radoshkovichi men, not having any wish to do that, did not support him. We, in Belarus did not have pogroms, unlike those in the Kiev region, or in Kishinev. A Belarusian views a Jew as a poor man, like himself, who even has fewer rights than a Christian.[31]

But in the *shtetl* of Baturino in the Vileika county a minor pogrom still took place on the market day. It began with a quarrel in Nakhim's store. A Christian customer started a fight, then it was joined by other Jews and our men. During and after the fight, Nakhim's goods were destroyed. Ten people were hauled before the judge. The correspondent reported:

> It is difficult to say who was most guilty in all of this, but it seems to me that the guiltiest were the quarts and halfquarts that the men drank a lot of.[32]

In some cases, that were described in *Naša Niva*, the result of the so-called "blood libel" can be seen. In the town of Buividzy in Vilna county a two-year old Christian boy was found slaughtered. While an investigation was taking place, some people began to blame the Jews. Two men wanted "to fish in troubled waters." They took a pair of pants and a cap in a Jewish store. The Jewish woman, fearing a pogrom, kept quiet. Two Catholic boys saw all that and they told the men to take the goods back. "It is good that we have just people in Belarus who will not allow such mischief by all kinds of evil-doers." Maybe, that's why pogroms don't happen in our land."[33]

In the town of Remigola in Kovna province a seven year old boy from a neighboring village was lost:

> There were some illiterate people who convinced the mother that the Jews killed her son. A pogrom was avoided, because the boy was found. A search was started for the four men who were most active in calling for a pogrom.[34]

An unpleasant episode that negatively characterized the relationship of Christians to Jews took place in the town of Krasnoe in Vileika county:

> In town there are such Christians that they cause us to be ashamed of them. A young Jewish couple was getting married near the school. Many Catholics and Orthodox gathered, and they began to laugh at the Jewish wedding, noisily preventing the rabbi from reading the prayers. Everyone respects their own faith and wants for it to be respected by others... And why do they consider themselves to be Christians?[35]

As a rule, the negative news that were published in *Naša Niva*, invoked morality, that is, they were designed to teach proper behavior toward Jews, and to present proper role models. The newspaper did not avoid describing unpleasant episodes in the relationships between Christians and Jews, but tried to place the moral accents alongside.

Naša Niva also described the facts of everyday life in the small towns of Belarus that united Jews and non-Jews – joint efforts in organizing educational and loan-granting institutions, teams of firefighters, cooperative business outlets. At the same time, Jews were more proactive in these joint activities, as a rule. Thus, during the organization of fire brigades in the town of Volpa it was reported that

> while the cause is very good and important with mostly Jews taking part there, it is a shame that our people are less willing to undertake it.[36]

Correspondent from Hermanovichi in Disna county wrote about the founding of a private Jewish school with "the Christian peasants having joined." The same report noted that in the town live Catholics, Old Believers, and many Jews:

> Fifteen years ago we located some Lithuanians. All Belarusians, Old Believers, Jews and Lithuanians live in peace, with the exception of the trouble at the Peter's Fair, where each year there is a custom to have a fight of one village against another.[37]

Information came from Kopyl in Slutsk district about a joint meeting of the town council of Belarusians, Jews and Tatars, at which construction of town schools was discussed:

> People who care about education in our town, such as Raman Malevič who had succeeded in getting the first school established in Kopyl, one consisting of two grades, and also one for girls, and who with Naha Kleynbort tried to persuade some illiterate townspeople about this worthy cause. In the end they succeeded, and almost all local residents agreed to have each home pay 2 rubles and 75 kopecks for the construction of the town school. The Tatars and Jews agreed without having to be persuaded! It is a shame that our illiterate people have such difficulty in joining the outside world. Any Kopyl resident seems able to find even more money for drink, and does it easily, without regrets.[38]

But the Christians in the town of Malech in Pruzhany district did not agree to give money to open a town school. The correspondent wrote:

> Our men act badly. Let them take example from the Jews, who do not regret giving money for worthy causes. They are concerned about the post office, they build roads to the railway station, pave the streets, dig good "artesian" wells. Our men, instead, while transporting alcohol from the landowner Zavadski to Pruzhany, know how to suck out some alcohol from the casks.[39]

The comparison of behavior between the inhabitants of towns of differing faiths is not in favor of the Christians. The correspondent from Dolginovo in the Vileika county reported:

> On May 3 our town suffered a major fire. Three houses burned down, two stables and a barn. The Jews fought the fire as well as they could, and the Christians were only kibitzing... The next day, the town clerk sent a policeman to solicit donations for the fire victims: among the Jews he collected forty rubles; the Christians refused to contribute.[40]

From the Grodna region, someone named M. Arol wrote:

> In my small town the Jews have formed a co-operative bank, they have a permanent theater, in which they show plays from their life – in short, they live for their people. Our educated people (and, there are many teachers) are not interested in anything, except card playing and drinking.[41]

Complaining about the members of the Town Council, the reporter from Radoshkovichi noted:

> The most cultured part of our town's population are still the Jews, our commercial and industrial class. The town would look different, if they had the right to be elected to the Council, being at least aware how they could benefit. The burghers cannot bring order to the town, they have neglected the town's economy, having only ruined it.[42]

Naša Niva editors drew the attention of the readers not only to the positive characteristics and features of the Jewish people, but emphasized their friendly attitude to the Belarusian national revival. So, it appeared that the Jews have learned the Belarusian language. Jadvihin Š. (Anton Liavicki) in his *Listy z darohi* (Letters from the Road) wrote:

> The local older Jews speak very good Belarusian. I happened in one place to meet an old Jewish woman, who had lost her hearing, while still in her youth. Not having heard the newfangled corrupted local language, remembered only the older – pure Belarusian language. It was a delight to listen to her: her conversation flowed like water; words clear and soft, flowing and singing. With great pleasure I sat a long time and listened to this Jewish woman.[43]

That the Jews speak Belarusian well is confirmed by this report from Sventsiany by a correspondent named Tutejšy [Local – BR], who wrote:

> the population prefers to shop in the Jewish store, because they speak our language. And there is a Christian co-operative store named "Polza" (in our language – Karysć) [Advantage - BR], however our Belarusians are afraid of this "Polza", because there sit such lords, descended from the peasants, that make fun of our people, laughing at their language... So, our people do right by not buying in that store.[44]

The closeness of Jews to Belarusian mores is recorded in the report from Smorgon printed in No. 34 from 1911:

> Two Belarusian shows were presented on the 17th and 18th of August. The artists played very well... At all the performances, mostly Jews were present and they sincerely welcomed the Belarusian theater. As can be seen, our shtetl Jews with whom Belarusians have always lived on good terms, began to understand the Belarusians love for their own culture. Thus it will not be so easy for the outsiders from Russia to sow hatred of Jews among Belarusians.[45]

Let us pay attention to the wording of "our Jews." This phrase is frequently found on the pages of newspapers and reflects the attitude of *Naša Niva* authors to the Jews as "ours". The phrase "have always lived in harmony" is often repeated in correspondence and is characteristic of the Belarusian-Jewish relations.

The Jewish theme was reflected in the literature and art section of the newspaper: in April of 1909 *Naša Niva* published a short story titled *Žyd* (The Jew). The author was Mačciet, the translation from the Russian into Belarusian was done by Vitaut Čyž (under the pen name Aĺhierd Buĺba). This work describes the good doctor – the Jew Gurveis and the horrors of Jewish pogroms, which did not spare the doctor's family.[46] The fact that this work has been translated into the Belarusian language and printed in the newspaper, is an example of the condemnation of Antisemitism on the part of *Naša Niva* authors.

Out of more than thirty *Naša Niva* materials in the period of 1906-1915 reviewed and analyzed by the author and dealing with the "Jewish theme", none reflected a negative attitude of *Naša Niva* editors regarding Jews. None of the texts contained disrespectful, incorrect statements about representatives of this nation. On the contrary, all manifestations of Antisemitism and pogrom agitation were criticized and condemned, the positive qualities of Jews were underscored, the objective picture of their legal and economic situation was shown. The parallels of the socio-economic situation of Belarusians and Jews were made and the emphasis was placed on the need for Belarusian-Jewish cooperation. *Naša Niva* authors often described the Jews as "our own." In print appeared such formulations as "our shtetl Jews," "our Belarusian Jews," "our Jews." The newspaper denounced any chauvinism, including a Belarusian one. Published articles focused on the expansion of the idea of tolerance among Belarusians, the condemnation of Antisemitism and discrimination against the Jewish population.

Jews were considered by the leaders of the Belarusian national movement as an integral part of the ethno-cultural landscape of Belarus, and as an integral part of the land's population in the future. Organizers and newspaper editors (Ivan and Anton Luckievič, Vaclaŭ Ivanoŭski, Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ, Alaiza Paškievič, Janka Kupala, Jakub Kolas, Zmitrok Biadulia, Vaclaŭ Lastoŭski, et al.), as well as numerous correspondents (about three thousand people) have shown a high degree of tolerance. The newspaper showed an adherence to the selected ideological line, aimed at uniting the democratic forces of the various national movements in the fight against Russification policies and the Russian authorities' chauvinistic propaganda.

It is difficult to agree with the claim that historically there has never been Antisemitism in Belarus.[47] It would be more appropriate to speak of the Belarusians' soft, non-aggressive version of Antisemitism. On one hand, the antisemitic manifestations of the Belarus' population are characterized by almost the same set of negative stereotyping of the "Jew" that was common throughout the Christian world. On the other hand, some "preventive" mass rallies, extralegal persecution against the Jews without proof of their guilt, not only are missing, but are condemned by people who at the same time were carriers of antisemitic stereotypes. The state-promoted Antisemitism of the Russian Empire had a minimal impact on Belarusians. The relationship between Belarusians and Jews can be expressed as "the other ours". Namely, the traditional sense of "the local togetherness", "local co-existence" prevented conflicts.

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Jewish agricultural colonies of Belarus and Ukraine in the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries

Volodymyr Goncharov

Due to existing historical circumstances, the Jews in the 19th century, represented the most numerous minority ethnic group of Belarus' and Ukraine's population, who substantially influenced the economic structures of these regions of the Russian Empire. The czarist government's policy is analyzed in relation to Jews wishing to participate in agricultural production; the article broaches the history of the beginnings of Jewish agricultural colonies in Belarus and Ukraine. The author reveals peculiarities in the worldview and mentality of the Jewish population in Belarus and Ukraine, and its mutual relations with these countries' titular nations. Agricultural skills acquired by Jews were used during the colonization of Palestine at the turn of the19th and 20th centuries. At the same time a general conclusion is reached concerning the czarist government's inconsequential and controversial policies concerning the Jews of the Pale of Settlement who desired to become equal participants in the agrarian sector of the Russian Empire's economy.

In the 19th century Jews were one of many ethnic groups of Belarus' and Ukraine's population, who substantially influenced the economic structures of these regions of the Russian Empire. While most of the population of the country were villagers involved in farming, Jews were characterized by a high level of urbanization and dominated in commerce and crafts. When tackling the issues of Jewish agricultural colonization in the Russian Empire, researchers usually would depict this trend of the Czarist policies as failed.[1] They are right by far, when this issue is investigated from the Russian historical perspective. But once a scholar finds himself/herself within the coordinate frame of the Jewish history, he/she could be able to see it from a different angle.

Judging from the historical perspective, the acquired farming experience was of great value for the Jewish population and it also introduced some peculiar changes into the Jewish mentality. Professor Israel Bartal of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem argues that

> the implementation of the Cossack model by the first settlers is one of the most instructive examples, demonstrating the influence of the originally plain Eastern European models on the shaping of the new Jew (first repatriates – VG) image.[2]

The life of Makhno's legendary associate Lev Zadov, who originally came from the Jewish farming colony Veselaya in Ekaterinoslav province, can be a prime example. Finally, once one considers the Jewish agricultural colonization as failed, one would not be able to comprehend modern Israel's success in agriculture. Thus, it is necessary to re-assess the Jewish agricultural colonization. A comparative analysis of the Jewish farmers' progress in Ukraine and Belarus during the period in question will not only provide new data, but also reveal the general tendencies of their functioning and development.

This geographical frame of this article is not a random choice. By the end of the 18th century, after dividing the Commonwealth of Both Nations and annexing the Crimea, the Russian Empire had gained not only new territories (significant parts of today's Ukraine and Belarus), but also new problems. The so-called "Jewish heritage" was one of them.[3] This existed mainly in the Belarusian lands, while in annexed Ukranian lands the Jewish presence was minor due to Khmelnytsky actions and the so-called *Koliyivshina*.

Russian government considered unloading of the over-populated provinces of the North-Western territory (i.e. Belarus) via Jewish agricultural colonisation of the New Russia (*Novorossiya* - BR) region (including Ekaterinoslav and Kherson provinces) as a partial solution of the problem, which was actually formalised in the Regulation on Jews (1804).[4]

This author's opinion is supported by the following facts. Once the Jews found out about this governmental initiative, 125 Jewish families from Grodna and some from Minsk petitioned to be endowed with some land within the borders of their provinces, but their petitions were denied.[5] And a perspective of a resettlement beyond the native parts did not raise optimism in Grodna Jewish environment.[6] Only the expulsion of Jews from villages and rural communities in 1807 provided the first groups of settlers from the western provinces of the Empire, who then before 1810 created eight colonies in the Kherson province.[7]

The year 1835 saw a new stage in the history of Jewish agricultural colonisation in the Russian Empire. The Regulation on Jews of 1835 provided for many Jews an actual opportunity to become settlers within the Pale of Settlement.[8] This regulation envisaged allotting government land not only in "New Russia," but also in the territory of the present-day Belarus, allowing Jews to settle on squire-owned lands and to purchase land allotments within the Pale of Settlement.

Those willing to start farming were endowed with benefits that included the liquidation of arrears in government tributes; exemption from the per capita tax for 25 years for those living on government lands and for 5 years for those living on private lands; exemption from military service for 25 or 50 years (depending on the social status); and exemption from regional monetary tributes for 10 years.

Those Jews who were willing to start farming on government lands in Belarus territory, unlike those in the "New Russia" region, did not receive any monetary allowances. That is why, for instance, in the Grodna province only 202 parcels of land, out of the total 407 allotted to Jews in 1847, were populated.[9] Settlement was more successful in the Minsk province.

An officer of the General Staff Illarion Zelensky reports that this province had 1,493 male and 1,931 female Jewish farmers by the year 1850.[10] The status of the Jewish farmer was further defined in the new Regulation (1844).[11] As Ilya Tcherikower indicates,

> ...most of the Jewish colonies were founded from this moment on and up to the second part of the 1850s: five new colonies were created in the Kherson province in 1840–41, four more around 1850, and the last two colonies in 1857–58; the year 1846 saw first settlers in the Ekaterinoslav province also came from the Belarusian territory, and again settling on government lands; almost all of the 17 colonies had been created here by 1855; also nine colonies in the Bessarabia province were created between 1833–53, however, here on private and rented lands, by immigrants from the Podolia province.[12]

It is worthy of note that the settlement policy of the Russian government was supported by the Jewish *Kahal* elite. First, they needed to "palm off the insolvent members."[13] Second, Jewish capitalists were granted personal and hereditary honorary citizen titles for their contribution to the founding of agricultural colonies. Thus, among the documents found in Belarusian National Historical Archive in Hrodna there are two petitions prepared by top-guild merchants Isaak-David Zabludovsky and Kopel Galpern for the promotion of Jewish farming. The first petitioned in 1843 for the purchase of land in the Grodna province in order to settle 100 Jewish farmers.[14] The second claimed that he was "willing to buy land in Grodna province in order to settle 100 Jewish male farmers and to also provide relevant assistance for them."[15] A similar situation existed in Ukraine. Thus, an exemplary private Jewish colony Morgunovka in the Kherson province is described in historical sources.[16]

Eventually the law of October 22, 1859 prohibited the settlement of Jews in the provinces of the North Western territory (i.e. Belarus). Later on, they were given the rights to settle on government allotments in "New Russia," to lease land from squires or to buy land. But already by 1864, they were deprived of the possibility to settle on private lands.

From the beginning of the reign of Alexander II, the attitude towards Jewish settlers began to change. Their "emancipation" ended, which meant that the formally free people were forced to stay in places of their registration. In 1861 they were allowed to engage in industry and commerce (provided they were incorporated into guilds), without leaving agriculture.

The regulation by the Committee of Ministers dated by February 12, 1865, endorsed by the Emperor, granted Jewish farmers the right of free transition to other social classes. By 1866 Jewish settlers ceased to be a separate group and fell within the ambit of general laws.

This is a short story of Jewish colonisation in the Ukraine and Belarus during Russian Empire times. The 1804 and 1835 Regulations on Jews offered opportunities for Jews to become settlers within the Pale of Settlement, which embraced the territories of today's Belarus and Ukraine.

The implementation of this project faced objective difficulties. First, the Jews lacked farming experience. Second, the government lacked necessary skills and was not capable to organise retraining on a large scale. Still, 21 colonies had been organised in the Grodna province by 1850, and 39 colonies in Kherson and Ekaterinoslav provinces between 1807–1860.

My analysis of the Jewish colonisation produced the following remarks. Firstly, Jewish settlers appeared in Ukraine earlier than in Belarus, and the process of active Jewish colonisation stopped in Belarus earlier than in Ukraine.

Secondly, the steady acculturation and modernisation of former Belarusian Jews became one of the main distinctive features of the Jewish colonisation in Ukraine. Under the influence of many factors (geographical, social and cultural) the traditional communal restraint yielded to open social interactions. That is why Belarusian Jews (*Litvaks*) who were known for their piousness, after finding themselves in the comfortable conditions of Southern Ukraine with its special social atmosphere and westernised culture and economy, became more susceptible to acculturation and modernisation than their congeners who stayed in Belarus.

As observers have noted, the Southern Ukraine region

> was the most motley mixture of apparel, faces, tribes, dialects and conditions; but this mix even more harshly influenced our coreligionists, who after leaving the predominantly stuffy environment of their congested villages and finding themselves on the loose in this new Eldorado, weltered in eccentric pleasures, both in costumes and in the way of life.[17]

Thirdly, the migration of Jews from Belarus to New Russia was supported both by the government (allotment of government lands, money allowances for travel and accommodation) and by the *Kahal* authorities (in their aspiration to get rid of undesirable and indigent persons). Farming colonies in Belarus were created mostly on purchased and leased lands by the Jews themselves, i.e. these Jews were better off.

This indicates, fourthly, that the first Jewish settlers in "New Russia" came from marginal quarters of society; they were ignorant and more conformist; it was survival, not high spiritual culture, that was vital for them. That is why the Ukrainian Jews, earlier than Belarusian Jews, faced the problem of developing a new, secular model of social and political behaviour.

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[2] Bartal, Israel. 'Kazak i beduin: novy mir natsionalnykh obrazov', pp. 263-278, in: *Vestnik Evreyskogo universiteta*, No. 24 (2001).

[3] See: Klier, John D. *Rossiya sobiraet svoikh evreev (Proiskhozhdenie evreyskogo voprosa v Rossii: 1772-1825)* (Moscow and Jerusalem: Mosty kultury, 2000).

[4] *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy imperii. Sobranie pervoe. Tom 28. 1804-1805* (Saint Petersburg, 1830), pp. 731-737.

[5] Nikitin, Viktor. *Evrei zemlevladeltsy: istoricheskoe, zakonodatelnoe, administrativnoe i bytovoe polozhenie koloniy so vremen ikh vozniknoveniya do nashikh dney. 1807-1887* (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya gazety "Novosti", 1887), p. 8; Borovoi, Saul. Evreyskaya zemledelcheskaya kolonizatsiya v staroy Rossii: politika – ideologiya – khozyaystvo – byt. Po arkhivnym materialam (Moscow: Izdanie M. i S. Sabashnikovykh, 1928), p. 41.

[6] National Historical Archives of Belarus (NHAB) in Hrodna, f. 1, op. 1, d. 100, l. 83.

[7] Tcherikower, Ilya. 'Zemledelie sredi evreev v Rossii", in: *Brockhaus and Efron Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://brockhaus-efron-jewish-encyclopedia.ru/beje/08-2/038.htm>.

[8] *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy imperii. Sobranie vtoroe. Tom 10. Otdelenie pervoe. 1835* (Saint Petersburg, 1836), pp. 308-11, 316-8.

[9] National historical archives of the Republic of Belarus in Hrodna (hereinforth: NHAB in Hrodna), f.1, op. 13, d. 399, l. 746.

[10] Zelensky, Illarion I. *Minskaya gubernia. Materialy dlya geografii i statistiki Rossii, sobrannye ofitserami Generalnogo shtaba*, part 1 (Saint Petersburg: Glavnoe upravlenie Generalnogo shtaba, 1864), p. 452.

[11] *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy imperii. Sobranie vtoroe. Tom 19. Otdelenie pervoe. 1844* (Saint Petersburg, 1845), pp. 887-890.

[12] Tcherikower, *op. cit.*, note 7.

[13] Borovoi, *op. cit.*, note 1, p. 92.

[14] NHAB in Hrodna, f. 1, op. 20, d. 968, l. 1.

[15] *Ibid.*, d. 1167, l. 1.

[16] Levanda, Ch. 'Evreyskaya koloniya Morgunovka, Khersonskoy gubernii, Bobrynetskogo uezda', pp. 352-354, in: *Rassvet. Organ russkikh evreev*, No. 22 (1860).

[17] P.O. 'Odessa', pp. 35-37, in: *Rassvet. Organ russkikh evreev*, No. 3 (1860).

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Jews in the economy of Belarus in the 19th – early 20th centuries: economic realities and the public reaction

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This study is based on abundant and varied sources. The text reveals the degree to which the topic is being researched and rejects any extreme interpretations in treating the role of Jews in Belarus' economic development in the 19th – early 20th centuries. It is demonstrated that Jewish business activities were a part of the economic system that objectively took shape on Belarusian lands at that time. That is why any accusations of Jews of alleged economic domination and exploitation of "Christians" are rejected. At the same time the author does not agree with authors who exaggerate the pauperization of the Jewish population and shows that the economic well-being of Jews in general was higher than that of Belarusian peasants. He concludes that Jewish business activities had a beneficial effect on the development of Belarus' economy.

When conducting historical research, one has to face a variety of different questions. Sometimes at first glance, the answer to these questions seems so obvious, as if the answer can be given immediately, without requiring any additional research or thought. Thus, if one faces a direct question on the role of Jewish entrepreneurship in the development of the Belarusian economy in the 19th - early 20th century, the answer could be immediate and still not incorrect: "Yes, it played a role, and the role was large." But such "obvious" character of the answer is just one of the reasons why this issue did not become a subject of complex, and above all, objective historical research. This article is merely an attempt to identify a whole range of issues which inevitably arise when one deals with the topic in question.

So, why is this article focused on Belarus, on Jewish entrepreneurs and why on this specific period? The reason is that the Russian Empire of the 19th – early 20th century was characterized by a major transformation of its economy, affecting its technical and organizational foundations. The beginning of mass production and railway construction were of particular importance in this regard. Moreover, these changes brought about important social consequences: the formation of the proletariat was taking place, as well as that of the bourgeoisie, which included entrepreneurs, who formed the country's business elite. The features of the new industrial society appeared more and more superimposed on the old picture of the traditional agrarian society.

Belarusian provinces were included in this process. Here, the transformation was closely connected with the Belarusian lands' difficult process of adaptation to the realities of the Russian Empire. The three partitions of the former Commonwealth of Both Nations (or even four if one takes into account the post-Napoleonic war period) did not solve, but rather exacerbated the problems facing Russia in the newly annexed Western territories. From being foreign policy topics, these issues have turned into Russia's internal problems. The Polish and Jewish issues and – with regard to Belarus from the middle of the 19th century – the Belarusian issues, became a part of these problems. The well-known triad "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" evidently began to falter.

Russian Orthodoxy found itself in a difficult situation, now closely facing Roman Catholicism, Greek Catholicism [Uniate Church – BR] and Judaism. It was able to justify its claim to the religious truth only with strong government support.

The autocratic state itself was able to rule and govern in the region only through a system of emergency measures. Introduction of General Governorships, of martial law, of a special legislative system and of numerous administrative restrictions, consistently emphasized the differences between the central Russian provinces and the newly annexed territories. The picture of a monolithic nation was obviously "spoiled" by persons of Polish and Jewish ethnicity. The authorities' perception of the native Belarusian population could be described by the words of the famous Russian poet Alexander Pushkin as "the people, close to us from the olden times."

However, Pushkin's less erudite countrymen tried hard to convince the Belarusians that they are not a separate people, but only a branch of the Great Russian tribe, albeit having been somewhat spoiled by the Poles.

In this sense, the introduction of the Pale of Settlement and the existence of a special legislation regarding the Jews was the most evident

proof and reflection of the complex problems faced by Russian imperial ideology and its policies in Belarus.

Indeed, all these aspects taken together affected the development of the Belarusian economy. It developed by its own laws, but still under pressure from the Russian official imperial policies.[1]

Prior to the incorporation of Belarusian lands into the Russian Empire, a quite a specific division along ethnic lines was established in the economy – Belarusian peasants, Polish landlords, and Jewish traders and craftsmen. Of course, this conclusion is not an absolute, but it was undoubtedly a specific historical model of that time.

In the 19th century the list of persons engaged in economic activities was supplemented by such categories as hired workers, manufacturers and factory owners, bankers, or administrators of state enterprises. The ethnic structure of the labor force became diluted and more diverse through the addition of the "Russian ethnic" element. A strict adherence of ethnic groups to certain types of economic activity, weakened. This trend was particularly visible in the formation of a new social stratum of entrepreneurs.

It should be noted that entrepreneurship as such was a closed issue for the Soviet historical science. Yet, it was possible to mention the names of Savva Morozov and Petr Tretyakov, but only within cultural, not economic, context. It was believed that the "bourgeois question" had been "once and for all" settled in October 1917.

It is no secret that Jewish studies have also been taboo for a long time. Thus, the history of the economic life of Jews and, especially of Jewish entrepreneurs, was doubly forbidden. This occured despite the fact that in the late 19th – early 20th century the Russian Empire had the biggest Jewish community in the world. According to the 1897 census, 5,063,100 Jews lived within its borders which was about half of the world's Jewish population. Nearly 1/5 of all Jews of the Russian Empire lived in Belarus and formed about 15% of its population.

Belarus is important for studying the topic of "Jews and economy" as a historical model. Its provinces were among those of the Russian Empire with classical processes and trends in economic life. In this regard, it should be noted that the Pale of Settlement did not include all the territories of today's Ukraine. Jews of the Kingdom of Poland (the Vistula territory) experienced double-Semitism – Russian and Polish – and it is questionable which one was stronger. Major port cities, like Odessa or Riga, also had a significant percentage of Jews with rather pronounced specifics of economic life.

Contemporary Jewish studies do not list the history of Jewish economic life among their priorities. This sphere looks very modest, compared to the studies of history of Jewish religion and culture, legal status of Jews, or anti-Jewish repressive policies. Alegorically speaking, in the interpretation of many historians, Russian history focuses on the issues of "icon and axe," while the Jewish history is often presented as that of "synagogue and pogrom."

But it was not always like this, and it is rather a historical tradition of the 20th century. At the end of 18th-19th centuries, it was the issue of the Jewish economic life, which often served as a pretext and the basis for the official position and the autocracy's policies toward Jews. During the reign of Catherine II, historical materials were literally full of numerous allegations of Jewish economic "dominance," which ostensibly plunged the region into poverty.[2]

There are two aspects to be emphasized. First, Tsarist Russia was not unique in this regard and directly followed a similar tradition of the Commonwealth of Both Nations (and earlier), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or even the global trends of searching for alleged Jewish economic "sins." Second, even in the second half of the 19th century, anti-Jewish argumentation remained virtually unchanged and in its polemical acuteness did not differ from that of the 18th century. For instance, the author[3] of the article *Aktsiznyi otkup i evrei posredniki* (Excise tax farm and the Jewish middlemen) did not spare his efforts to tarnish the image of Jews:

> The populous class of workers, our breadwinners, lives here in subservience to another tribe's greed, which is vigilantly and actively seeking to destroy its morality and take its every earned penny. ...With their crafty, perfidious machinations and deceptions, they supercede all the cunning and greedy tricks of the English traders in India and elsewhere. Under the guise of enlightenment, the English invade foreign lands and already then, without hiding their intentions, take from the natives their property through violence and cruelty. The Jews' start is simpler and more tempting: under the guise of hospitality, they first give a free shot, knowing that a true Slav will not leave without emptying his pockets to pay for the meal, leaving him penniless. ...Wherever the Jews did settle among the peasants, the people are left in the most pitiful situation, without cattle and bread, lazy, exhausted and sick.[4]

This is not an example of tabloid journalism, but an excerpt from an almost academic *Trudy Imperatorskogo Volnogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva* (Works of the Imperial Free Economic Society).

Thus, by the middle of the 19th century the negative assessment of the Jewish contribution to the economic development of the Russian Empire dominated the official Russian political, journalistic and scientific milieu. The entrepreneurs, i.e. persons most noted for their economic initiative, were criticized most brutally.

Among Jewish scholars it was, perhaps, Ilya G. Orshansky (1846-1875) who first drew attention to the economic life of Jews within the Russian Empire. His main views on this issue are presented in articles with eloquent names: *Vzglyad na ekonomicheskiy byt russkikh evreev* (A view on the economic life of Russian Jews), *Blagodenstvuyut li evrei v Zapadnom krae?* (Do the Jews prosper in the Western Region?), *Evrei-krepostnye* (Jewish bondsmen), *Chto takoe evreiskaya torgovlya i promyshlennost?* (What is Jewish trade and industry?), *Evreiskaya torgovlya i vnutrennie gubernii* (Jewish trade and internal provinces), *Zemledelcheskiy trud u evreev* (Agricultural labor of the Jews), *Evrei i torgovlya pityami* (Jews and spirits trade).

Orshansky rightly noted, that not a single side of the Jewish question was subjected to such a frequent discussion as the question about the meaning and nature of the Jewish industrial activities. One can even say that this subject contains the whole essence of the Jewish question, so that one or another view on this subject determines the fate of the Jewish people in every country.

Thus the "verdict" of the public opinion declares: "the more developed is the Jewish industry, the worse it is for the rest of the population.[5]

The main polemical intensity of his articles was focused against this attitude. According to Orshansky, after the abolition of serfdom, "the overall economic progress of Russian life turned out to be detrimental to the interests of the Jewish population."[6] Moreover, over the last 15-20 years "the drop of economic well-being among the Jews" was seen. Orshansky sees the following reason for this situation:

- after the abolition of serfdom both the landowners and the former bondsmen strived for greater economic independence and the role of a Jew as an intermediary, decreased;
- improved communication lines and the construction of railways undermined the economic basis for the existence of a considerable number of Jews, who worked as taxi drivers or had owned inns;
- decrease in the number of state-owned contracts, supplies and leases, which had constituted "a very profitable business for the Jews";
- liberalization of custom tariffs in 1857 and 1868 undermined illicit trade, which had formed an important part of Jewish profits.[7]

Orshansky argues that

> the Jews mainly operate as middlemen; of the three factors of production – labor, natural resources and capital – Jews operate almost exclusively in the capital factor: it is not surprising that the modern development of the Russian life blamed the Jews for all its disadvantages – since every change in social relations has its unfavorable side.[8]

Thus, Orshansky, in fact, supports the previous accusations against the Jews, and with abolition of serfdom, he proposes to make a sharp distinction between the past and the present.

While addressing "a very sensitive, but the core issue in question: is Jewish trade useful or harmful?", Orshansky concludes:

> Jewish middleman role brings losses to the Jews themselves, while the farmers and producers generally benefit. The correctness of this conclusion cannot be doubted, even though it contradicts the common belief.[9]

Here, Orshansky begins to use the Greatrussian officials' argument, slightly modifying it and flipping the script: in fact, the foreigners (Russian: *inorodtsy*) are still guilty, but now it is those of foreign origin. He further emphasizes that

> the trade in the Western Region is really no longer not in the hands of Jews, but rather in the hands of foreigners. ...The local merchants are just their clerks.[10]

Moreover, he argues that foreigners dominate local industry and this results in "the precarious situation for the Jewish manufacturers."[11] It turns out that the Jews,

> with a few exceptions, are mostly involved in manufacturing industries, that require only a very small capital, the simplest tools and a few workers. Briefly, they deal only with the types of production that only mistakenly can be classified as factories, and in reality appear quite unsophisticated and produce goods of low quality.[12]

Thus, another historical trend emerged: the idea to diminish (up to complete denial) the level

of economic influence of Jews, and to exaggerate (up to hyperbole) the level of poverty within the Jewish community. It is easy, on one hand, to see views opposite to the dominant, almost official, doctrine. On the other, there are reiterations by the populist Russian publicists on the sufferings of the Russian peasantry. However, in this case in parallel to the peasantry, the entire Jewish community was presented as sufferers.

Orshansky saw the way out of this "poverty situation" in the transition of the "Jewish population from the former, purely commercial and middleman life towards the nation-wide economic life." He believed that this transition had already been accomplished in Western Europe, and Russia was now experiencing this transition period.[13] Orshansky had a glowing picture of future perspectives:

> in addition to the great development of industry and manufacturing in general, the Jews as a practical, energetic and capable people will certainly be able find more space for economic activity.[14]

However, he clearly formulated the main obstacle on the way to this future:

> First of all, the government must destroy all the exceptional legal provisions that regulate the life of the Jewish community. Perhaps, at one time, these laws were seen as benefits, by providing Jews with a certain degree of freedom and independence within their internal community. …That time has passed. What was once a privilege, has now become a burden and suffocating care. It is time to eliminate the barriers that prevent the Jews from living the same civic life as the surrounding population.[15]

In Tsarist Russia Orshansky's proposed argumentation has been further developed by other Jewish scholars and writers. It can be stated, that, the more the Jews were accused of economic "pressure" against the Christians, the louder were the calls to allow free play to the Jewish economic initiative. However, let us focus on historical facts. They contest the validity of the Orshansky's concept.

In Belarusian territories Jews almost entirely controlled such spheres of economy as the tobacco industry, manufacture of matches, wallpaper, significant portions of the silicate and construction industry (production of tiles), typography, leather tanning, fur industry, production of soap, watchmaking and jewelry business. This assessment referred both to the labor force and business, as the principle "a Jew works for a Jew" was a fairly common practice. Jewish capital was used and played a prominent role in the brewing, glass and chemical industries, woodwork and furniture production, agricultural engineering, and cereal and flour milling business. Jewish businesses were present at all "levels" of Belarusian economy.

Jews owned not only numerous small, but also medium-sized and large enterprises. Among them one can mention the Shereshevsky tobacco factory in Grodna with the largest number of workers in the pre-revolutionary Belarus; paper factory in Shklov – the second-largest enterprise of its kind; JSC "Dnieper manufactory" in Dubrovno – one of the largest enterprises in the textile industry. Jews also owned unique enterprises-monopolies on the Russian market, including the pencil factory in Grodna (one of four of this kind in the Russian Empire) and the eyeglass and optical appliance factory in Vitebsk (the first of its kind in the entire country). According to Belarusian historian Michaś Bič, Jewish bourgeoisie owned more than a half (51%) of Belarusian factories and enterprises.[16]

Characteristically, in their quite naive and unsuccessful attempts to downplay and even to deny the role of Jewish entrepreneurs in the industrial production, the Jewish publicists still did not dare to talk about the role of Jews in the credit and financial system not only within the Pale of Settlement, but throughout the entire Russian Empire. They preferred not to discuss this side of the Jewish economic activity, although, the Ginzburgs or the Polyakovs with their financial empires could not remain unnoticed. As for private lending in Belarusian provinces, the historical facts strongly suggest the dominance of Jewish capital in this sphere.[17]

It is known that the creation of a full-fledged credit and banking system in the Russian Empire began in 1860 with the establishment of the State Bank. Then came the private commercial banks, mortgage banks, city banks and other credit institutions. Being at that time a part of the Russian Empire, Belarusian lands were also affected by this process. During the years of 1870-1914 in Belarus operated 14 banks and 48 bank branches, numerous banking offices, credit unions, savings and loan associations.[18] Jews played the most active role in the creation and development of this network of banks and credit organizations.

State Bank branches were opened in all provincial towns of Belarus – Grodna, Vilna, Minsk, Mohilev, and Vitebsk. The Archives of Belarus provide us with an opportunity to study the organizational scheme and activities of the local pro-

vincial branches of the State Bank. Thus, for "the first installation" of the Minsk branch (opened on October 27, 1881) 1,500 rubles was assigned; its subsidiary capital was 1,000,000 rubles in notes of different denominations. The branch was temporarily located in the house of Abram Y. Kaplan (a merchant belonging to the 2nd guild) on the Koidanovskaya Street. Later, a separate building was constructed on Podgornaya Street.[19]

Provincial branches of the State Bank had the right to extend credit to industry and commerce. It looked quite attractive for local entrepreneurs. Already on August 9, 1882, a group of the leading Minsk merchants, mainly of Jewish origin, applied for a permit to open accounting operations at the Minsk branch of the State Bank.

In response to the request from the Minsk branch, the Board of the State Bank on March 11,1883 granted its permission to do so under the condition that "at first, the sum requested for the operation should not exceed 200,000 rubles." One year later, the Minsk branch was authorized to provide commercial loans up to 300,000 rubles, in 1885 – up to 500,000 rubles, and in 1886 – up to 600,000 rubles.[20]

Activities of the branch in commercial lending were quite stable, though the size and number of loans, and total amount of money used for this purpose varied. Thus, in 1887 the Minsk branch of the State Bank provided loans for 152 customers. The main spheres covered by the loans were forestry and lumber trade (38 loans or a quarter of all the loans provided). Another 49% of loans were provided for other trade activities. Bank offices (M. Polak and Weisbrem; and M.A. Braude, a Minsk top guild merchant) received two loans. Three loans were provided for manufacturers, two of whom were Jews – A.B.Frumkin (brewery) and N.Y. Iakobson (iron foundry). The remaining loans were provided for trading operations and were received mostly by Jewish merchants. The size of loans ranged from 500 to 40,000 rubles.[21]

The situation had not changed twenty years later. In 1909, the total amount of loans provided by the Minsk branch of the State Bank (2.8 million rubles) was distributed as follows: forestry – 46.9%, money transactions – 18.9%, local trade – 17.3%, factories and plants – 14%, agriculture – 2.9%.[22] As before, Jewish entrepreneurs were the main recipients of commercial loans provided by the Minsk provincial branch of the State Bank.

In the management of the State Bank branches, an important role was played by the Accounting committees. Opening of credit lines, accounts and bill discounting were discussed during their regular meetings.

Upon recommendation of the manager of the State Bank's Minsk branch, the Minister of Finance approved the first board of local Accounting committee members. It included Minsk merchants Volf Rappoport, Aron Liakhovsky, Abram Kaplan, Abram Shabadt, Adam Bernikovich and Stepan Goksevsky. In his recommendations the manager of the Minsk branch of the State Bank emphasized that

> all these persons are known in the city as people with good reputation and a good knowledge of trade in Minsk and Minsk province, as well as individuals who pursue these activities [i.e. trade – A.K].[23]

The Accounting committee members were appointed for a two year term. They made a written promise to keep trade secrets and they highly appreciated their appointment. Thus, Abram Shabadt, a Minsk 2nd guild merchant, in his letter to the State Bank's Minsk branch manager wrote:

> I will try to justify your confidence in me to the highest degree, in general considering the promotion of development and proper increase of trade and proper issuance of credit in this region as my pleasant duty.[24]

Interestingly, when the landholder gentry were appointed as the Accounting committee members, their knowledge of the real economic situation in the region and the role of Jews in it, was emphasized. For example, landowner, industrialist and Minsk homeowner Adam Jelski was characterized as "useful when considering trade bills not only of Christians, but also Jews, as Mr. Jelski speaks and writes in their language."[25]

In general, the activities of the Minsk branch of the State Bank were also typical for its other offices in the Belarusian provinces.

At the same time, in Belarus, as elsewhere within the Pale of Settlement, the realities of economic life and the significant role played by Jewish businessmen clearly contradicted the official imperial policies towards Jews.

Politics was bound to acknowledge the primacy of economy: the appointment of Jews as members of the Accounting committees of the State Bank's local branches in fact, violated the ban for Jews to hold public offices. Moreover, while providing services and loans for Jewish entrepreneurs, the local branches of the State Bank obviously contradicted the official doctrine of "combating Jewish dominance in the economy".

In the 1860-70s, the emancipation of peasants coincided with the "emancipation of capital." Organization of private joint-stock commercial banks boomed in the entire country. Opened in 1864, the Saint Petersburg Private Bank was the first among them, followed a year later by the Moscow Merchant Bank. During five years (1864-8) six joint-stock banks started their activities, while in the subsequent five years another 33 banks were established.[26] The examples from Saint Petersburg and Moscow in the organization of commercial banks had an impact on other regions. They are very well aware of the urgent need to open local banks. Thus, while considering in 1871 a project of the Mohilev commercial bank was presented, Mohilev Governor emphasized:

> in the absence of a credit institution in Mohilev which provides loans, borrowing money mainly from the local Jewish capitalists is extremely difficult and very costly. . ..The establishment of a commercial bank in Mohilev can therefore have positive impact on the development of trade and rural industry in the province.[27]

One should note that the attempt to "Russify" private credit was not successful. The development of financial institutions in Belarusian provinces was characterized by both active participation of the Jewish capital and use of greatest experience of Jewish financiers in conducting money transactions.

The first joint-stock commercial bank was opened not in Mohilev, but in Minsk. Perhaps, this confirms the correctness of Isaac Levin's assessment, who directly linked the establishment of banks to the construction of railways.[28] Railways came to Mohilev only in 1902, while Minsk in 1873 became a junction of two major railways – the Moscow-Brest and the Libava-Romny. It was on 10th of September of that year that the Minsk Commercial Bank was opened. Initially its common equity amounted 1,000,000 rubles.

According to its charter, the bank had the rights to discount Russian and foreign bills; issue collateral loans; receive bill payments on promissory notes and other fixed-term instruments and securities; make payments and money transfers to all locations of its branches, commission agents or correspondents; purchase and sell public and private securities and precious metals; taking deposits on term-fixed, demand and current accounts; custody of securities and other valuables.

A prominent role among the shareholders and the administration of the Minsk Commercial Bank was played by Jewish businessmen. They also constituted a majority of its customers.

The first bank seizure in the Russian Empire was the collapse of the Moscow Commercial Loan Bank. It took place in October 1875 and the subsequent bank panic also affected the Minsk Commercial Bank. In just one month, from October 1 to November 1of 1875, with its current accounts and deposit 64,507 rubles were withdrawn from its current and deposit accounts. As a result, the total amount money accumulated on its all accounts decreased from 453,370 to 388,863 rubles. However, the new bank managed to overcome these difficulties, which indicated that the bank was strongly linked with the nation-wide banking system and, accordingly, managed to immediately react to changes in it.

On one hand, the Minsk Commercial Bank was influenced by the Saint Petersburg Discount and Loan Bank.[29] On the other , the bank was expanding its operations by opening branches in other cities. Initially such offices existed in Libava, Romny, Konotop and Gomel. The largest one was the Libava branch. Thus, in 1891 its net profit was 46,000 rubles, while the aggregate income of all other branches amounted to 33,500 rubles.[30]

Later branches of the Minsk Commercial Bank were opened in Zhitomir, Mohilev, Belaya Tserkov, Cherkassy, Pinsk, Vorozhba, Sumy, Rovno, and Priluki. This quite clearly emphasized the economic and geographical scope of its activities that were focused on Belarusian and Ukrainian parts of the Pale of Settlement.

The Minsk Commercial Bank reached the peak of its activity in 1897. From November 1897 its shares for the first time were listed on the Saint Petersburg Stock Exchange. With nominal value of 250 rubles, its shares were sold for 310 rubles. In the note filed to Minister of Finance Sergei Y. Witte, the board of the Minsk Commercial Bank stated that

> the bank is losing its original character as exclusively local Minsk credit institution. ...As a result of the money reform, discounted bills and other liabilities are re-discounted and placed abroad.

Therefore, the board submitted a request to rename the bank to the West-Russian Discount Bank.[31] However, already in 1895 the Petersburg-Azov Bank (this bank was controlled by the Polyakov family and had its office in Minsk) acquired most of the shares of the Minsk Commercial Bank. This predetermined its fate. In 1899-1906 the price for the Minsk Commercial Bank shares at the Saint Petersburg Stock Exchange fell from 325 to 200 rubles. Moreover, starting from 1905 shares were sold at dis-

count (i.e. less than 250 rubles). Since 1906, the bank sharply decreased its operations. On July 31,1908 an extraordinary general meeting of its shareholders decided to initiate liquidation proceedings. On April 15, 1912 the board of the Minsk Commercial Bank approved a contract with the Azov-Don Bank on the final disposition of its assets and liabilities.[32]

Dissolution of the largest local bank in Belarus did not lead to the collapse of the entire banking system in the region. The empty segment was quickly filled by other Belarusian branches of the all-Russia's largest joint-stock commercial banks.

Both public and private commercial lending interacted very closely and directly. The State Bank was in the center of the credit and financial system of the Russian Empire, while its provincial offices performed this duty locally. Moreover, their influence was not limited to the direct funding of local commercial banks, their branches and their activities' supervision.

More subtle mechanisms also applied, though they could be visible only after the analysis by the personal staff of the bank administration. For example, merchants A.E. Lurie and B.M. Pines were members of the Accounting committee of the Minsk Commercial Bank. Merchant of the top guild M.I. Shabadt was a member of the Accounting committee of the Northern Bank's Minsk branch. Merchant of the 2nd guild B.S. Goldberg was a member of the Accounting committee of the Petersburg-Azov Commercial Bank's Minsk branch, and after its closure he took on the same role at the Minsk branch of the Northern Bank. At the same time, they were all members of the Accounting committee of the State Bank's Minsk branch.

Banking houses and offices were the main actors in the sphere of commercial credit. The difference between them was conditional. As a rule, the larger firms were called banking houses. However, the turnover of some banking offices exceeded those of the banking houses. In order to get the banking house status, a banking office did not require to provide any specific evidences of its activities. "I.E. Ginzburg", "L. Polyakov" and "The Ryabushinsky Brothers" were the three largest banking houses of the Russian Empire the late 19th - early 20th centuries. The first two had their roots in Belarusian lands.

The Ginzburg family had accumulated its initial capital in Belarus but pursued its main business activities beyond its borders. On the contrary, the Polyakov family had acquired its economic power in Russia but later expanded their businesses to their homeland. Among the banks under their control, the following had offices in Belarus: the Petersburg-Azov Bank (Gomel and Minsk), the Moscow International Trade Bank (Brest and Vitebsk), the Orel Commercial Bank (Bobruisk, Brest, Gomel, and Orsha) and the South-Russian Industrial Bank (Mohilev). Being a part of the Polyakov bank group, the Moscow Land Bank was one of the main providers of private mortgage loans in the provinces of Minsk and Mohilev. Lazar S. Polyakov was its founder and the long-time chairman of its board.

Obviously, we can only make assumptions on the true nature behind the business expansion of the Polyakov family in Belarusian lands. Thus, we believe the time of their "return" to Belarus was not a coincidence, as it took place during the office of the Vilna Governor General Alexander L. Potapov.[33]

When S.S. Polyakov in 1866 started his acute and protracted struggle for a concession to build the Voronezh-Rostov railway, it was Alexander Potapov who rendered all possible and apparently lucrative assistance. Potapov was close to Emperor Alexander II and at that time served as an appointed chief of the Don Cossack Host. The railway was to pass over this large area. Soon after, Potapov suddenly became the owner of a large fortune (his contemporaries linked this fact with the name of S.S. Polyakov) and was appointed Governor General of the North-Western territory. It was the time to repay his benefactor, and it was under Potapov's time in office when "the Belarusian branch" of the Polyakov financial empire had been rapidly developing.

Of course, it is difficult to trace the owners of the cash flows passing through Belarus. Although the exact figures are probably impossible to determine, the personal composition of the banking institutions' administration provides us with very interesting conclusions about the place of the Polyakov family in credit circulation of Belarus.

Boris Y. Polyakov was the chairman of the Minsk Commercial Bank and a member of the board of the Petersburg-Azov Bank. His brothers Lazar and Samuil were also members of the Petersburg-Azov Bank's board. The executive manager of this bank was Isidor M. Kon, whose brother Zenon was a long-term director of the Minsk Commercial Bank.[34] The founder of the Petersburg-Azov Bank, Y.S. Polyakov was the father of Boris, Lazar and Samuil. He was the person who in 1895 bought the majority of shares of the Minsk Commercial Bank.[35]

A number of the Polyakovs' risky and speculative ventures had failed which resulted in the collapse of their financial empire.[36] The first signs of the coming collapse became clearly evident in 1898. In 1901, a de facto bankruptcy of the L. Polyakov's banking house and its group of banks took place. The State Bank intervened and provided multimillion loans to banks controlled by the Polyakov family (the Orel Commercial Bank – 3,000,000 rubles, the Moscow International Commercial Bank – up to 9,000,000 rubles). However, this treatment did not help. Among other consequences of this failure was the collapse of the Minsk Commercial Bank.

In the shadow of the financial magnates operated (and often flourished) financial entrepreneurs of a lower rank: owners of banking offices, money-changing shops and bill discounters. According to the imperial ministry of finance, in January 1910 there were 287 banking offices and 88 money-changing shops. The largest number of banking offices was in the Belarusian-Lithuanian provinces (99 offices), followed by the Vistula territory (42) and the Southern provinces (33).[37] The vast majority of the banking offices were controlled by Jews. As can be seen, there was a complete coincidence between the boundaries of certain financial activities and borders of the Pale of Settlement.

Banking offices and discounters were closest to the client and literally followed him. Many of these offices combined banking operations with trade, and sometimes with the ownership of an industrial enterprise. For their operations banking offices collected the same interest as did the private banks. It was 1.5-2% higher than that of the State Bank. Depending on the customer and the services provided, smaller offices collected from 12 to 24%.

The geographical distribution of the banking offices and of the areas of individual discounters' activity was very wide: it ranged from the provincial cities and district-level towns to small boroughs.[38] The biggest banking offices accumulated a lot of money and were, in fact, mini-banks. This is confirmed by the fact that some local banking offices opened their branches (also beyond the administrative borders of the Belarusian provinces). Thus, Minsk banking office "S.I. Eliasberg" (est. in 1878) had its branches in Tsaritsyn and Uralsk; Slonim banking office "Perlis and Ginzburg" (est. in 1885) – in Belostok and Volkovysk; Pinsk banking office "Idel Samuil Lurie" (est. in 1866) – in Mozyr. In turn, for instance, Brest had a branch of Belostok banking office "A. Gorodishch" and the Warsaw banking office "Soloveitchik and Morgenstern."[39]

Joint-stock commercial banks maintained constant business relations with a wide range of banking institutions. For example, on the eve of and during the pre-war industrial boom, the Azov-Don Bank did business with a large group of provincial banking offices, including the Pinsk banking offices "G. Yudovich and N. Kukolev" and "Idel Samuil Lurie."

In the economic situation of Belarusian provinces, an important role was played by small credit institutions, that were based on the principle of collective responsibility of its members - the mutual credit societies or associations.

In Belarus, the first societies of this kind emerged in 1874 in Minsk, Mohilev and Vitebsk. The growth of credit societies in Belarusian provinces was especially rapid in the economic boom years before the First World War, as elsewhere in the whole Russian Empire. This process affected not only the provincial and district cities and towns, but also small boroughs and villages.

The mutual credit societies provided their members with credits out of their registration fees (working capital) and mobilized liabilities. They performed the same operations as the joint-stock banks did, with the exception of the securities purchase at their own charge (companies were allowed to buy securities only at their clients' expense).

Whereas banks had to deal mainly with high profile customers, the small and medium entrepreneurs widely used the services of mutual credit societies. Often such societies had a specialization, providing services for certain sectors of the economy. For example, before the First World War in Minsk, in addition to the oldest Minsk Credit Society there were the Merchants' Mutual Credit Society (est. in 1905), the Commercial and Industrial Mutual Credit Society (est. in 1911), the Timber Society of Mutual Credit (est. in 1914), the Municipal Credit Society (est. in 1896), the Handicrafts Credit Association (est. in 1901). The names of these companies quite clearly indicate their profiles and composition.

Credit societies often demonstrated very high levels of efficiency. For over ten years (1894-1905), the Polotsk Mutual Credit Society paid a 15% annual dividend. A maximum annual dividend of the Pinsk Mutual Credit Society reached 17%.[40] Jewish entrepreneurs dominated both numerically and financially among the initiators,

participants and managers of the credit societies established in all districts and most cities and towns of Belarus.

Historical records clearly show a significant Jewish contribution to the development of banking in Belarus. Its monetary system of the second half the 19th - early 20th centuries was a direct reflection of the economic realities and the role played by Jewish businessmen and Jewish capital.[41] Being members of the Accounting Committees of the State Bank's branches in the Belarusian provinces, Jewish entrepreneurs could, to a certain extent, influence the state banking system.

Indeed, in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries, Belarusian trade was characterized by its "Jewish face." According to the 1897 census, the ethnic composition of the merchant class in the five Belarusian provinces was the following: Jews – 87.9%, Russians – 8.7%, and Belarusians – only 1.9%.[42] While this situation had evolved over centuries, it became most noticeable during the period in question. Perhaps, this was one of the most visible manifestations of the historical trend towards the socio-economic "specialization" of ethnic groups residing on Belarusian lands. Jewish merchants and traders had from the Middle Ages occupied a prominent place in Belarusian trade, and in the 19th century they dominated it. When in 1803 there were 297 Christian and 248 Jewish merchants in the Minsk province[43], or approximately equal numbers, then according to the 10th revision (1857) data, the situation had changed significantly: out of 2,946 merchants there were 2,627 Jews. In 1860 in the ten district towns of the Minsk province, Jews owned 377 out of 395 merchant shops and 1,249 out of 1,325 city shops.[44]

A similar situation was observed in other Belarusian cities and particularly in small towns, though at the end of the 18th century the number of Christian and Jewish merchants there was more or less equal. For example, in 1793 in the town of Dubrovno there were 20 Christian and 45 Jewish shopkeepers.[45] A century later, the picture was totally different and this town was described by an eyewitness as a place where

> in addition to a small number of Jewish shopkeepers, tavern-keepers, and artisans, the rest of the population are Jewish handicraftsmen, amounting to just over 2,000 people.[46]

The Russian autocracy had repeatedly sought through legislative measures to change the increasing percentage of Jews among the merchants in the western provinces. These policies were particularly active under the reign of Nicholas I. A series of decrees (adopted on July 17, 1832; August 3,1834; December 24, 1841, and March 28, 1849) introduced a number of measures aimed at attracting Russian and Ukrainian merchants to the Belarusian provinces.

These measures did not produce the expected effect. On the contrary, the Jewish capital largely acquired from trade, sought to expand its activities beyond the Belarusian provinces, settling even in capital cities

It is not possible to give a complete picture of this phenomenon and, in particular, to provide its quantitative characteristics. However, some Jewish capital data imply that this process has taken place on a rather large scale. During the reign of Alexander III, internal "repatriation" of Jews who found themselves beyond the Pale of Settlement borders was one of the measures aimed at strengthening the Russification policies. For instance, the number of Jewish families deported from Moscow only to a Belarusian town of Shklov were as follows: 47 families or 180 persons by June 1891; 40 families or 162 persons between June and October 1891; 20 families or 101 persons in January, March and April 1892.[47] There is also evidence that the deported did not belong to the poor segments of the Jewish community: "Gomel started growing fabulously. ...After the expulsion of Jews from Moscow in 1891 ... they made the trade boom here."[48] They also brought new merchant capital which contributed to the economic development of the city.[49]

A significant role of Jews in the Belarusian commerce developed as a result of a whole range of reasons, and its origins go back in history. Tsarism was unable to abolish the centuries-old historical tradition. The authorities' efforts led to results opposite to those planned. By limiting freedoms of movement and settlement of Jews (the Pale of Settlement, the ban to reside in rural areas), and artificially narrowing the possible scope of their activities (ban to hold state, administrative and military positions, as well as to engage in agricultural activities or military service), the Russian autocracy unintentionally pushed Jews into the allowable economic niches. Commerce was one of those niches. The real economy had once again demonstrated its superiority over state policy. Countering the policy, the Jewish business survived and won, since it was originally configured to face fierce economic competition and has not relied on the state's overprotection. Thus, the Jewish business developed not because of the state and its policies, but in spite of them.

Therefore, one should view critically the official, explicitly negative assessment of the Jewish "domination" in the economic life (and particularly in commerce) of Belarusian provinces. Although, even the official publications occasionally provided sober evaluations. Thus, even in the middle of the 19th century, an officer of the General Staff Illarion Zelensky observed:

> In our opinion, there is no reason to assert that the Jewish monopoly in commerce and crafts is an evil that impedes the development of commercial enterprise in the country. The reason for such a monopoly should rather be sought in the reluctance of the local population towards commerce, in its innate disposition toward agricultural industry, in the habits of the Christian and the Jewish population, in country's economic conditions, and finally in the historical course of events, which influenced the formation of the current social strata and population classes.[50]

The author fully agrees with this assessment made some 150 years ago, and especially with the last argument explaining the situation. Despite certain and inevitable stereotypes related to ethnic distortions in the economic structure of society, the general effect of the economic efforts of Jewish businessmen was, of course, beneficial for Belarusian economy's development.

However, despite the Jews' trading activity, they never did completely monopolize the commerce. First, the examples of commercial efforts undertaken in the Belarusian provinces by foreigners can be found everywhere in Belarus. They usually represented the interests of individual shopping centers and of commercial companies and were engaged in wholesale trade of goods not produced in Belarus.

Second, in some regions of Belarus, local Christian merchants and traders still formed a significant portion of entrepreneurs. The region of Gomel was an example. Thus, in the district of Belitsa in 1833, all three merchants of the 2nd guild were Christians, while out of 104 merchants of the 3rd guild the number of Christians was 36. At the same time, in the neighboring Cherikov all merchants were Jews (5 merchants of 2nd and 22 of the 3rd guild). In the provincial center of Mohilev, the ethno-confessional distribution was the following: one Christian and 20 Jews in the 2nd guild and 39 Christians and 225 Jews in the 3rd guild.[51]

Among the burghers of Belitsa partly involved in trading activities were 1071 Christians and 2008 Jews. However, in the provincial center and other district-level cities of the province of Mohilev, the number of Christians involved in trade did not exceed one third of the number of Jews. Moreover, in Bykhov and Senno there were no Christian burghers among traders at all.[52]

On one hand, this peculiarity of the Gomel region can be explained by the promotion of peasant entrepreneurship by the owners of the vast Gomel estates Nikolai P. Rumyantsev (in the first quarter of the 19th century) and the Paskevich family (from 1834). A well-known philanthropist and patron of the arts Rumyantsev, was generally tolerant toward his tennants of the Jewish faith. He funded the planning and the construction of the synagogue, permitted the organization of Jewish schools and assisted in the development of Jewish businesses.[53] On the contrary, the members of the Paskevich family – and particularly Ivan F. Paskevich, the Field Marshal and the minion of Emperor Nicholas I – barely concealed their Antisemitism.

On other hand, the mentality of Old Believers who constituted a significant portion of the local population probably played a role as well. The propensity towards entrepreneurship among Old Believers was not a secret at that time and was also noticed by historians. In modern Russian historiography one can observe parallels drawn between the businessmen with the Old Believers background, and Max Weber's views on the role of the Protestantism and the Protestant ethic in the development of capitalism.

The difficult and interesting issue of business formation among Belarusian Old Believers and, especially, the history of the relationship of these two groups of merchants (i.e. Belarusian Jews and Old Believers) require a separate and more detailed study.

Because of their historical specifics, the nascent merchant class remains the only group of entrepreneurs in some societies. However, it is often the merchant milieu that produces manufacturers, industrialists, financiers, and owners of transport companies. These businesses become a logical continuation of trading activities by virtue of economic laws. Therefore, the history of commerce is in fact the history of the merchants' gradual differentiation and transition to other categories of business activities. However, this process often has incomplete character. In this regard, the evolution of commerce in Belarus followed the most common model.

Moreover, the development of the industrial society changed the economic situation. It led to a greater autonomy of industrial processes and commercial activities. Initially the industry was

largely subordinated to commercial operations: a merchant often completely controlled the purchase of raw materials, organized and coordinated production and product sales. As a result of these changes, a trader became linked to the production cycle in its initial and final stages, i.e. his involvement covered the purchase of raw materials and of the necessary equipment and the sale of commercial products. At the same time, organization and management of the production process was taken over by the factory owners. This was largely due to the technical changes in the industry, which required special training and dictated the need for further business specialization. However, the trading system also got more complicated and called for similar requirements for entrepreneurs. This trend was linked to market saturation with goods, differentiation of forms and types of commerce, emergence of new products, and the birth of the advertising business and marketing.

These developments are reflected in the history of the Belarusian merchants. In fact, the Belarus' trading milieu within the Russian Empire was going through a process which could be called "the merchants' revision."

In this regard, the forestry business can be the best illustration of this process. It is known, that the use of forest resources has long been a traditional and one of the main sectors of Belarusian economy. At the end of 18th - first half of 19th centuries this business was usually conducted as follows: forest owners (i.e. landlords) sold cut blocks to the merchants who cut trees, exported and sold timber, hired peasant loggers, carters and raftsmen, agreed with customers, and personally financed and organized all parts of the aforementioned process. At the same time, long-established forest crafts (manufacture of pearlash, charcoal, and tar) continued to exist as a part of the landlords' business. However, in terms of their commercial value these businesses could not compete with export and sale of timber.

In the second half of 19th century significant changes took place in this business sector. On one hand, as a result of technical progress, the old wooden sailing ships were replaced with iron steamships. This inevitably reduced the demand for ship timber which was the main article of Belarusian forestry exports. On the other hand, timber formed the core of new sectors of economy, including match, cardboard, pulp, paper, and wood chemical industries. Unlike the marine shipbuilding, these industries allowed for the use of timber directly on Belarusian lands. Steam engines and, especially, distilleries used wood as fuel. Mining industry, coal mines, and railways could not do without wooden lining materials and ties. Urbanization also contributed to the development of timber industry, as wood was used as a building material and the main heating fuel. In addition, the growth of cities and towns increased the role of the furniture industry.

All this has led to significant changes in commerce. Thus, it was the Jewish merchants who founded all match and furniture factories and developed plywood and hardwood production in Belarus. Participation of Jewish merchants in the Belarus' paper industry development was more modest. It was limited to the construction of cardboard and paper mill in Shklov (1890). At the same time, all wallpaper factories as well as the entire production of envelopes, albums, office books and other stationery accessories belonged to Jews. They also controlled most printing houses and the cartridge-case production which used paper. A son of the top guild merchant from Kharkov M. Eliashev founded a pencil factory in Grodna.[54] Thus, a new group of entrepreneurs was formed among the Jewish merchants - industrialists.

The merchants who sold timber directly were also affected by the changes. By the end of the 19th century quite a large group of merchants of Jewish origin was formed, focusing on large scale domestic and export timber trading. They preferred to deal with finished timber products. These merchants organized markets, performed assessment and grading of the products, and provided their transportation to the consumers. This was accompanied by the process of improvement and sophistication of the timber trade. Its new forms emerged (timber markets and exchanges). In the early 20th century, fairs in Gomel and Minsk became the main places of wholesale timber trade.

By 1900, the annual turnover at the Gomel fair (it took place annually from 1 to 10 January) had reached 3,000,000 rubles. It decreased in the following years (2,500,000 rubles in 1906 and approximately 2,000,000 in 1910),[55] although still remaining quite high. One of the reasons was "the decline of timber trade in the southern mining region."[56]

Another reason was the establishment of a weekly Christmas Forest Fair in Minsk (it took place from 27 December to 4 January). Its annual turnover reached more than 20,000,000 rubles. In terms of turnover, it was the third-largest fair in the Russian Empire after the Nizhny Novgorod

(annual turnover 167,000,000 rubles) and Irbit (annual turnover 25,000,000 rubles) fairs.[57] At the same time, the Minsk fair was the largest specialized fair in the entire country.

Both fairs were oriented toward export. Their trading operations were often financed by banks. Large timber transactions at the Minsk fair led to the idea of establishing a special Timber Bank. While losing its usual turnover, the Gomel fair had acquired the features of exchange trading marketplace. More and more entrepreneurs entered into contracts during the fair. For this purpose, the Gomel fair committee had allocated a special contractual hall.[58]

The List of Timbermen residing in the province of Mohilev, placed in *The 1914 Memorial Book of the Mohilev Province*, contained 174 names. All these people were Jewish merchants and 29 of them resided in Gomel.[59]

This led to the emergence of a new type of timber merchant. This person was knowledgable in local and international conditions of timber markets, was interested in the development of communications and legislative regulations for the timber industry, and was able to get mobilized to defend his interests.[60]

In the beginning of the 20th century there was quite clear differentiation and even antagonism among the entrepreneurs engaged in timber trade. This becomes clear from the tax papers. The report from a Minsk tax inspector describes the timber trade in 1902 as follows:

> Forests of the Minsk province are highly valued in the markets. ...Forest industry includes timber felling and its milling for different types of materials. These materials are partly sold on-site and delivered to the railways. However, a bigger part of them is rafted to the timber market. Timbermen sell their products either on delivery spots by floating on rivers to timber merchants (who raft timber to the markets), or in advance. ...Many timbermen raft the material to timber markets at their own expense and risk. There they sell it to different timber merchants and companies.[61]

In 1900, a Minsk tax inspector informed the head of the Minsk treasury chamber of the difficult situation on the Ukrainian timber market which directly affected the interests of the entrepreneurs from Belarus. In 1899, the prices on timber products from the Belarusian provinces fell. It was caused by the lack of railway rolling stock, accumulation of the last year production, and expected competition from the Urals forest traders. Thus, while waiting for higher prices, large traders from Belarus decided to hold their timber goods. These tactics triggered the activities of smaller traders:

> Small traders and timber companies appeared. They do not have any stocks and are waiting for the rafts' arrival to start the season. In normal times small traders are ignored by the timbermen, as people prefer to deal with large, creditworthy firms. But last year, timbermen found it profitable to maintain close trade relations with them and even patronize their activities in every way. This small buyer has found it advantageous to pay the prices dictated to him by timbermen. Small traders ... were joined by the so-called sawyers, whose number is significant during the navigation... There was an impending danger for large timber merchants to come off the loser. So, they rushed to buy goods at prices that were set during the initial transactions with small traders.[62]

At the end of the 19th century the actual "merchants' revision" was legalized by the imperial government. In 1898 the Regulation on state trade tax was adopted. As a result, a direct linkage between the purchase of guild documents and the obligatory obtaining of a trade license was abolished. Acquisition of the guild certificates began to depend solely on the entrepreneur's will. The price of guild documents was relatively low: 50 rubles for the top guild and 20 rubles for the 2nd guild. In 1906 the price was raised to 75 and 30 rubles respectively.

This new situation explains the pessimistic conclusion made by an entrepreneurship historian Pavel A. Buryshkin, who came from a wealthy Moscow merchant family. According to him,

> the municipal statute (1892) and particularly the Regulation on state trade tax city regulations (1898) have consigned the merchant class to unavoidable extinction.[63]

This view was shared by the Soviet historians:

> In the 20th century the development of commerce was declining. The merchant status was gradually transforming to being the attribute of entrepreneurial tradition. It provided its holders with virtually no social benefits and privileges. This resulted in the fact that the largest capitalists mostly stopped acquiring guild certificates and withdrew from commerce.[64]

But it would be wrong to extend these conclusions to Belarus. The situation in Belarusian provinces was considerably influenced by economic and ethnic factors, as the belonging to the top merchant guild had retained its value for the local Jewish entrepreneurs.

Commerce in Belarus in the late 18th - early 20th centuries faced a transformation process as complex as that in the industry, transport and ag-

riculture. It had been restructuring on a classical capitalist basis. The direct organizers of commercial processes (i.e. merchants and traders from the Belarusian lands) had experienced the same complex evolution.

The thesis about the foreign domination of the Belarusian economy cannot be confirmed. This is particularly true with regard to the allegation that foreigners not only competed with the local Jews, but also subjected the Jewish entrepreneurs to their influence.

Despite presence of foreign businessmen, their number was not sufficient to define the nature of Belarusian economy. Moreover, they were not capable to dislocate the monopoly of Jewish entrepreneurs in the certain sectors of economy.[65] At the same time, there was evidence of Jewish entrepreneurs from Belarus being granted foreign citizenship.[66]

Good examples of the stable economic situation of Jews was the emergence of Jewish entrepreneurial dynasties. The Luries and the Shereshevskys were the richest and most famous of Jewish business dynasties in Belarus. The family business is not just a sum of economic efforts of the people bound by their kinship. Formation of a business dynasty is the result and the best evidence of sustained economic success. An entrepreneurial dynasty is the upper class of business. The history of the dynasty is often the brightest page in the history of a certain sector of the economy. Numerous confirmations of this thesis can be found in the economic history of Belarus. It is important to note that the Jewish entrepreneurial dynasties can be found at all "levels" of the Belarusian economy, i.e. among large, medium and small businesses.

These dynasties were formed not only in the cities, but also in the *shtetls* throughout Belarus. For example, during the entire 19th century the Pines family dominated textile manufacturing in Ruzhany (Pruzhany district, Grodna province) and Kossovo (Slonim district, Grodna province). Kopys (Gorki district, Mohilev province) was the largest center for the production of tiles. The Eitingons from Shklov (Mohilev province) were engaged in fur trade, insurance business and owned a steam sawmill. The efforts of three generations of the Vishnyak family made this dynasty one of the largest property owners, bankers and insurance workers in Vitebsk.

As mentioned before, one of the most affluent business dynasties Belarus were the Luries and the Shereshevskys. The Shereshevsky merchant dynasty was engaged almost exclusively in production activities. Their first business and the base of their economic power was a tobacco factory in Grodna. It was founded in 1862, and soon became not only the largest in terms of the number of workers in Belarus (1,400 in 1914), but also the largest tobacco factory in the North-Western provinces. In addition, the Shereshevsky family owned a distillery and a cardboard factory in Grodna, and a wire and nail factory in Vilna.

The Lurie family had more extensive scope of economic activities. In addition to industrial enterprises located primarily in Pinsk (steam mill, creamery, chemical plant, plywood mill, wooden shoe-nail factory), the Luries engaged in river transport and owned two banking offices.

Many Jewish dealers, shopkeepers and commissioners successfully worked in the shadow of the economic "giants". Aliaksandr Ulasaŭ, a prominent figure of the Belarusian national movement of the early 20th century and the publisher of *Naša Niva* provided such compelling evidence of this situation:

> The current competition takes place, for example, at numerous rural markets not only between the sellers, but also between the buying traders. Mobility of a Jew, his energy and small needs made the Jews the most cost-effective intermediaries in the country. The smallest emerging spheres of the trade could quickly organize, grow and become a significant economic factor. Through this army of traders the purchase of a whatever little thing can be easily arranged throughout the entire country.[67]

There is a fairly rich historical material regarding the place and the role of Jews in Belarusian economy in 19th – early 20th centuries and the impact of Jewish entrepreneurs on the economic development in Belarus. The author assumes that through entrepreneurship, the Jewish population took a sort of economic revenge for all political, legal, cultural and religious oppression and restrictions by the Russian Empire that were targeted against the Jews.

The additional incentives for Jews to actively engage in business are also clear, as is the achievement of a certain economic, and eventually, educational status, was almost the only opportunity for a Jew to leave the Pale of Settlement. Meanwhile, Jewish publicists of that era continued to develop a set of theses that were presented by Ilya Orshansky. A typical example is the work *Rol evreiskogo naseleniya v ekonomicheskoy zhizni Rossii* (The role of the Jewish population in the economic life of Russia) by Ruvim M. Blank. The author's aim is "to sum up the economic results of antisemitic policies."[68]

Blank consequently argued that "a widespread and rapidly growing belief that Jews have accumulated huge capital is as shallow as many other stereotypes about Jews."[69] He claimed that there is the same number of large capitalists among the Jews as among other nations.[70] Without providing any statistics, he continued to describe in great detail the plight of Jewish artisans, small traders and the poverty among Jews. Blank insisted that

> most of the Jewish factories within the Pale of Settlement were in fact workshops without mechanical engines; that Jews mostly established businesses that did not require large capital expenditures (unavailable to them); their factories are generally poorly organized, in haste, as if they were meant to be temporary.[71]

As is evident, Blank did not pay any attention to the fact that the statistical data did not consider production facilities without mechanical engines, as factories. After more than 30 years after the Orshansky, Blank still claims that

> the largest industrial enterprises of western Russia are mostly controlled by landowners and foreigners; the low economic level of the local (Jewish) industrial and commercial class could only rarely allow the emergence of large and reputable entreprises.[72]

Similar vision of the situation can be found in the book *Nesostoyatelnost zakona o cherte osedlosti evreev* (The failure of the law on the Jewish Pale of Settlement) by F. Meyer. In his conclusions the author nearly quotes Orshansky:

> while seeking the abolition of "the Pale", we want Russian Jewry to be provided with a full opportunity to use their business skills and talents for the benefit and economic progress of our country; to present good ground for Russian economists to confirm not only the harmlessness of Jewish economic activities, but also their major achievements.[73]

The chapter *Ekonomicheskoe znachenie cherty osedlost*i (Economic importance of the Pale of Settlement) from the monograph *Cherta evreiskoy osedlosti* (The Jewish Pale of Settlement) by Iosif M. Bikerman further develops the views of Ilya Orshansky.[74]

In his article *Evrei i russkoe narodnoe khozyaistvo* (Jews and the Russian national economy) prepared for the Russian Society for the Study of Jewish life, Mikhail Bernatsky proclaimed:

> Anyone who wants the Russian national economy to prosper, who dreams about its mighty development, about the real emancipation from foreign influences (insofar as the economic laws make it possible), should understand that Antisemitism is the worst enemy of our economic prosperity.[75]

At the same time, his own statement that "Jews comprise more than one third (35%) of the trade class in the Russian Empire" did not prevent Bernatsky from claim that in the West (with the exception of Galicia and Romania) Jews are a part of the wealthy elements, while

> in Russia the vast majority of them are proletarians, "free as a bird," the bitterly poor, who do not know today what tomorrow will bring.[76]

Among the few publications in which the Jews themselves were willing to talk about their economic achievements, there was a very thorough monograph *Ekonomicheskaya rol evreev v russkoy lesnoy torgovle i promyshlennosti* (The economic role of Jews in the Russia's timber trade and industry) by Kh. Korobkov. According to him, the North-West region, i.e. roughly today's Belarus, "exclusively due to the creative initiative of the disenfranchised Jews played a prominent role in entire Russia's timber industry and trade."[77]

However, significant social cataclysms followed soon. As a result, even an attempt to adequately analyze economic and historical realities had for a long time become impossible. There was a number of scholars who focused on the Jewish issues during the relatively short period that preceded the purges of the 1930s. However, they merely prefered to follow the path offered by Ilya Orshansky. Belarus was evaluated as an economically backward region, with a prevalence of handicraft and home industry. The local urban industrial bourgeoisie (mostly Jewish in ethnic terms) was

> particularly weak … and at the end of the 19th century was put on the back burner to a much greater extent than the Russian bourgeosie, on one hand, by foreign capital and, on the other, by the agricultural capital. A significant part of the urban bourgeoisie was formed by traders and money lenders. Those who were involved in manufacture employed backward technologies, in contrast to the foreign capital and the capitalist landowners who supplied advanced technologies to Belarus and Lithuania. The local urban bourgeoisie operated in the most backward industries.[78]

The topic "Jews and economy" did not wake from oblivion in modern Belarusian historiography. There is a historiographical paradox: the individual academic texts on the economic activities of the Jews are very rare in comparison, for example, with the solid works on Jewish charity,[79] although it seems logical to study the financial sources of philanthropy and patronage. This would address the issues of Jewish capital creation and the Jewish economic life in general. Thus, even in the modern historical lit-

erature on Belarusian Jews, the representatives of the Polyakov entrepreneurial family are identified as "public figures," without any further description of their economic activities.[80]

The assessment of Jewish entrepreneurs' role in the economic development of Belarusian provinces, and the Russian Empire in general, has its own intrinsic value. At the same time, it has a definite value as an integral part of history of economics and business. Both in the past and today, this evaluation represents not only (and not as much) the scientific knowledge, but remains a reflection of very complicated societal perception of the realities of the Jewish people's economic life. Moreover, as the historiography of this issue clearly illustrates, it is both an evaluation "from the outside" and the Jewish self-perception.

The topic "Jews and economy" has attracted the attention of Western scholars. One can mention the works by Werner Sombart. Being complicated in itself and located at the junction of two scientific disciplines, the economic history poses a double challenge for the scholar, as he or she has to search for new information and at the same time engage in a struggle with the old stereotypes, rooted in the 19th century.

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Jewish trade in Belarus between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 20th centuries

Emmanuil Ioffe

This article is devoted to the history of Jewish trade on the Belarusian territory from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. It focuses on trade, industry, and commerce sectors dominated by Jews. The main directions, the most important features, distinctive traits, techniques, and methods applied in these sectors of the economy are discussed. The article presents relevant statistics and is based on numerous Belarusian, German, Polish and Russian sources.

The idea of Jewish dominance in Belarusian trade in the beginning of the 20th century dominated the public opinion of the Russian Empire. A famous Russian geographer and statistician, Pyotr P. Semyonov and an academician, Vladimir I. Lamansky were the general editors of a series *Rossiya. Polnoe geograficheskoe opisanie nashego Otechestva* (Russia. The Full geographical description of our Fatherland). Volume 9 which contains the following lines:

> The occupations of Jews are very diverse. The main part of Belarus' industrial sector and trade is concentrated in their hands. Neither a Pole, nor a Belarusian demonstrates such a propensity to trade or craft professions. Thus, trade, industry, and handicraft are almost monopolized by the Jews. And this is the way it has been developing for several centuries, almost from the very beginning of their settlement in the North-Western territory. As a result, some Jews have enormous capital; the century-long traditions already brought by their migration to Belarus from other countries; they have developed a habit of accumulation and capital savings... Jews cannot be accused of prodigality, because parsimony and prudence constitute the main features of their character; finally, there are no drunkards among them. Thus, a Jew has all the features that contribute to the increase of his wealth.[1]

In 1855, Mikhail Bez-Karnilovich, a Belarusian historian, local ethnographer and Major General of the Russian army, wrote about Belarusian Jews:

> [they are a]dventurous, curious, perspicacious. From the first site, from the first phrase they will understand who they are dealing with. To reach their goal, they go in for all the possible means: they prostrate themselves, compliment, beg, bribe and thus very rarely fail in their endeavors. They calculate the gains of any business transaction in advance, and only then they undertake the task. The whole trade in Belarus is in their hands. With a small amount of cash and borrowed loans they make a tender: when they sustain losses, they lose both capital and pawns of their grantors... A landlord needs to sell or buy something? Or does he need new craftsmen or suppliers? Jews will always find something for a suitable price, their services are paid by both sides. Jews have a deep knowledge of people's disposition, intentions and habits, and they know how to use their weaknesses...[2]

One should agree with the opinion of the Belarusian historian Olga Sobolevskaya that if one wants to find a certain stereotype of a typical Jew (which is equally absurd as a search for a typical Belarusian or Pole), he could mostly likely be portrayed as a salesman. Available statistics do prove active involvement of the Jewish population in trade.

As the German historian Bernard Dov Weinryb argues, by the end of the 18th century the proportion of merchants among the Jews ranged from 25% to 30%, which is 13 times higher than among Christians.[3] Moreover, almost all occupations of the Jews were directly or indirectly connected with trade.

Thus, virtually all significant sales or purchases took place with direct or indirect participation of the Jews. As an officer of the Russian General Staff Illarion Zelensky observed, “the Jews were in charge of trade, speculations and small local frauds.” He further emphasized, “If you risk to handle without a Jewish mediator, you will definitely waste your profit and come off as a loser.”[4] At the same time he criticized the view of the negative role of “Jewish dominance” in the sphere of trade. Zelensky therefore underlined:

> there is no reason to assert that the Jewish monopoly in commerce and crafts is an evil that impedes the development of commercial enterprise in the country. The reason for such a monopoly should rather be sought in the reluctance of the local population towards commerce, in its innate disposition toward agricultural industry, in the habits of the Christian and the Jewish population, in country’s economic conditions, and finally in the historical course of events, which influenced the formation of the current social strata and population classes.[5]

Jewish trade in Belarus at the end of the 18th – beginning of the 20th centuries has long been a subject of study. Certain aspects of this topic were analyzed in the works of the scholars from the Russian empire Kh. Korobkov, Ilya Orshansky, Andrei Subbotin, Yuli Hessen, Iosif Bikerman, Nikolai Gradovsky, Illarion Zelensky, Pavel Shpileuski, German historian Bernard Dov Weinryb, Polish historian Maurycy Horn, American historian John D. Klier, etc.[6]

Olga Sobolevskaya can be regarded as one of the most prominent contemporary Belarusian historians, who consistently focuses on Jewish trade in Belarus at the end of 18th - the first half of the 19th centuries. This issues has also been addressed in her two monographs:

- Goncharov, Volodymyr and Olga Sobolevskaya. *Evrei Grodnenshchiny: zhizn do Katastrofy* (Jews of the Hrodna region: life before the Catastrophe) (Donetsk, Nord-Press, 2005);
- Sobolevskaya, Olga. *Povsednevnaya zhizn evreev Belarusi v kontse XVIII – pervoy polovine XIX veka* (The daily life of the Belarusian Jews in the end of the 18th – first half of the 19th centuries) (Hrodna: HrDzU imia J.Kupaly, 2012).

Some aspects of the history of the Jewish trade in Belarus in the 18th to the beginning of the 20th centuries were addressed in the works of Belarusian (including Belarus-born – BR) historians Zakhar Shybeka, Ina Sorkina, Andrei Kishtymov, Natallia Paliataieva, Leonid Smilovitsky, and others, including the author of this text.[7]

According to the Russian imperial laws, the top guild consisted of merchants with the stated capital of more than 10,000 rubles, the second guild – from 5,000 to 10,000 rubles, and the third guild – from 1,000 to 5,000 rubles. In 1807, the amount of capital required to join the merchant guild increased. It comprised 50,000 rubles for the top guild, 20,000 rubles for the second guild, and 8,000 rubles for the third guild. The working capital of the Jewish merchants in Belarus was usually not too big. In small towns the vast majority of merchants belonged to the third guild.

Tourists of the 19th century had an impression that only Jews were engaged in trade in the Belarusian cities and towns. The archives confirm this view. Jewish merchants from the town of Liutsin (Vitebsk province) sold flax, bread, vegetables, cattle, while those from Grodna sold flour.[8] Jewish merchants from Dribin (Mohilev province) imported grain to Russia.[9]. In addition to those, there are dozens of similar examples from other Belarusian cities and towns. According to the calculations made by the Polish historian Maurycy Horn, in 1793 Jews comprised approximately 80% of all merchants in Mohilev.[10] What is more, these Jewish merchants had very modest assets.

In the center of the Novy Shklov there was a hospitable court, which was a traditional place of trade for any old city or town. It was a state-owned one-storey square building with towers at the corners and gates on its two sides. In the early 19th century the court hosted 120 there were 120 merchant shops, "in which local Jews sold various goods."[11] Jews sold cloth, silk made in the local factories, fruit, small-wares, fur and other peddlery. By comparison, the court also accommodated 70 shops of Orthodox merchants, bondsmen of a local landlord Zorić.

They sold iron, dishware, fish and other products. Shklov was the home of tree Jewish merchants of the top guild, three from the second guild, and 15 from the third guild.[12] In the middle of the 19th century Jewish merchants of the Mohilev district played a major role in the trade between Mohilev and Riga, Memel, Königsberg, Danzig and the cities of southern Russia.

In the early 1880s, four out of five merchant stores and 46 out of 51 merchant shops in the Mohilev province were controlled by Jews. Jews owned the only bookstore; 127 out of 140 petty shops; 287 out of the 297 premices which did not look like apartments; 10 out of 11 merchant barns; the two timber yards; 29 out of 33 restaurants; all nine inns selling beer; all four wholesale wine stores; the two grog-shops; 47 out of 53 pubs; one out of three confectioneries; eight out of twelve bakeries. Thus, Christians controlled 57 commercial establishments, whereas Jews owned 596.[13] One can agree with the assessment of a Russian scholar Korobkov, who argued that Jewish commercial activities influenced their way of settlement: both in the countryside and the urban areas they lived along major roads or navigable waterways.[14]

Rural areas remained the main target of the Jewish trade in the end of the 19th century. However, as a result of legislative changes made in 1882, this trade started focusing on cities and towns. As Leonid Smilovitsky suggests, Jews proved themselves in all spheres of trade, including foreign trade. However, their success was most remarkable in domestic trade, including market, retail delivery, and stationary trade.[15]

The functioning of the domestic market was secured by a large number of small commercial intermediaries. Peddlers, factors, drovers, brokers and commissionaires controlled the retail delivery trade. Peddlers sold petty wares needed in peasant life. Factors collected business information, provided consultations and offered mediation services. Drovers bought up wholesale meat, fish, cattle and agricultural stock in order to re-sell these goods. Brokers assisted in preparing and making a good trade, while commissioners executed orders for a certain fee.[16]

Merchandise, profitability, and other features of Jewish trade

A key question regarding this context asks what goods provided Jewish merchants with the greatest profit and what goods were the most popular in the first half of the 19th century? In order to answer to this question, we refer to the archival materials on the properties of the Radziwiłł family as well as to the aforementioned book *Povsednevnaya zhizn evreev Belarusi v kontse XVIII – pervoy polovine XIX veka* by Olga Sobolevskaya. The liquor and grain traffics brought stable profit. Grain was bought from local landowners and peasants and than floated on the large rivers abroad (by the Nioman to Königsberg and Riga, by the Buh up to Danzig, and by the Dnieper to the Black Sea).

In the beginning of the 19th century fabrics became the most popular commodity among Jewish shopkeepers. While noting the active involvement of the Jewish women in retail sales, one should emphasize that fabrics were the best sellers for their businesses. The second most popular category of commodities sold by Jewish traders to the Radziwiłł family consisted of groceries, especially cereals, flour, coffee, tea, sugar, raisins, cuccades, bay leaves, anise, olive oil and vinegar. Despite the fact every inn and estate of the Radziwiłł family produced vodka and beer, calculations made by Olga Sobolevskaya demonstrate that alcohol was the third most popular and most profitable category of goods sold by Jews.[17] Beyond any doubt, this category also included foreign grape wines. Such goods as office supplies and especially paper also easily found a ready market. Forage – oats, barley, hay, and straw – formed another typical sphere of Jewish trade. Metal products always formed a part of salable assortment in the shops of Jewish merchants in, for example, Nesvizh and Slutsk. Jews were also drysalters, as they sold saltpeter, wax, color, Prussian blue, turpentine, or glue.

The German historian Bernard Dov Weinryb suggests that the most important features of the Jewish commercial activities in Russia and Poland were

> mobility and ability to offer a consumer nearly everything that could come useful for him. …A Jewish merchant could only successfully exist and compete with non-Jews, if he was selling everything possible, without any focus on specific types of products. He brought colonial goods from Riga, namely satin, velvet, fancy goods and other products, and at the same time delivered other goods abroad. … He sold all types of products: fancy goods, wine, cattle, textiles, glass, eggs, timber, salt, tobacco, corn, flax. …When a new sphere of production was about to develop, Jews had always been the first to try getting benefit from it.[18]

The second feature of the Jewish trade was the drive to minimize the time of capital turnover. That was why a Jew rather tried not to make profit only from a certain deal, but to increase the number of deals. This made Jewish trade flexible and mobile. That is why Jews tried to invest their assets in the trade branches that could ensure access to a broad market and cover the needs of mass buyers. The third feature of the Jewish trade in Belarus was that Jews used all their assets and also tried to use loans as much as possible. The fourth feature was that traders tried to use all the options to get involved in the direct interaction with the sales market. Even average traders traveled to the remote market places to get acquainted with the local terms of trade. Jewish traders took the initiative to approach the customers, while other sellers were waiting for the customers to reach them.

What were the hallmarks of the Jewish trade in Belarus? First, it was a subject of legal restrictions and oppression. Moreover, the large number of Jewish merchants in the Belarusian part of the Pale of Settlement led to extremely high competition between them. Second, it was characterized by wide circulation of goods taken on credit due to the lack of traders' own assets.

Third, the drive to maximize turnover because of the low profits made the Jewish trade more speculative and, therefore, more risky. The Jewish historian Ilya Orshansky observes the following typical features of the Jewish trade,

> this trade has significantly contributed to the Russian manufacturing through enhanced sales of their products in the Western and Southern Russia and the mediation services between them and the Western Europe. Second, Jewish trade was not based on the exclusive principle of charging exorbitant prices, which was the main feature of both

> the Russian *kulaks* and the Asian trade. Instead, it was based on the quick return and little income or even losses... Third, according to the Russian merchants, the Jewish trade was distinct, as it lacked its fundamental nature (i.e. assets) and solidity in a merchant sense... Thus, small-scale retailing was the Jewish strong point... Fourth, by his smartness a Jew creates new sources of public wealth (breeding of domestic animals, birds and picking blueberries could now be supplemented with the export of Spanish flies).[19]

One of the crucial actors of the Jewish trade between the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries in Belarus was that of factor, a typically Jewish occupation. He delivered the necessary goods, took their surpluses and contacted merchants and peasants. Agency was his main task, as he helped to find a customer for a trader and vice versa. In addition, he provided traders and customers with various information.

In 1853-55, the Belarusian ethnographer and folklorist Pavel Shpileuski had published a series of essays on the Paliessie region in the journal *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary). In his essays the author emphasized that,

> in the Western Russia a Jewish factor is exactly the same as a newspaper for a resident of the capital city or an archive for an archaeologist. He will tell you about all the places of interest in the city/town, mention all the famous people, tell where these persons live, whom they know, what they eat and drink, what bed they sleep on, how wealthy they are, how much income and debts they have, what they do, what are their plans, where they plan to go and where they get extra income from, who and when arrived, how this person settled his deal, etc. In other words, he will tell you anything you would like to know about his city/town and even more. He will be ready to take care of all your tasks, no matter how difficult they are, and will accomplish them. Moreover, do not think that his services are expensive: not at all! Only for half ruble the factor will be running for the whole day.[20]

The the Jewish community was characterized by its mutual credit mechanisms and the lack of specialization which helped Jewish merchants to successfully compete with their Christians counterparts. In a Jewish store one could by everything at once. The stock ranged from tea to dresses and in a way resembled today's hypermarkets. Moreover, the products were relatively cheap. That is why goods sold by Jewish merchants were available both for peasants and poor townees.

The trade flourished even at the small curvy streets of the Jewish districts in most Belarusian cities and towns. A tray with modest goods (such as round cracknels, fish, and different household little items) was simply installed next to a house. The trading process was organized by women. Usually the eldest daughters were responsible for these activities while their mothers were doing laundry in the rich houses or selling in the shops.[21]

Numerous Jewish shops were located in the market squares and central streets of major Belarusian cities. Their premises were either owned by Jews or leased from the city authorities. The customers of these shops were offered nearly everything – small wares, groceries, foodstuff, metalware and secondhand items.[22]

A Jewish shopkeeper did have particular schedule. Instead, he worked the whole day from early morning till night when potential buyers were still walking the streets. Lack of any professional differentiation among Jewish traders helped them to squeeze their Christian competitors. Erosion of consumer demand or purchasing power resulted in the occupational conversion of Jewish traders to craftsmen, laborers or teachers. Buyers had never been told that some products were out of stock. In such cases under any pretext, customers were asked to wait. The owner ran to the neighbor's shop where this product was on sale and made a deal (*gesheft*) with a colleague.[23]

One of the forms of trade in Belarusian cities and towns was "depositing the grain." On market days Jews bought wheat from farmers, garnered it, and then sent one or two cars of grain to the bread traders. Thus, this was a way to exist for those who had at least some money. The poorest Jews drummed up farmers to the buyer's barn and got their penny for that.

While dealing with his potential buyers, an impoverished Jewish seller was extremely intrusive. If he was not able to attract a bypasser with his own goods, he started begging his "victim" to be compassionate at least to his little children suffering from hunger and buy at least something. Being kicked out from the house, the peddler appeared in the window of a tavern or inside and continued moaning. People often preferred to buy his silence for the price of a small item.[24]

Fairs were the main sphere of the Jewish trade in Belarus up to the 1880s. The famous St. Hanna Fair in Zelva (Grodna province) was particularly popular. It was attended by numerous Jewish traders from the territories of today's Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania. In addition, the goods of Jewish merchants were bought and sold at the Sts. Peter and Paul Fair in Beshenkovichi (Lepel district), the Assumption Fair in Svisloch (Volkovysk district), the Baptismal Fair in Lyubav-

ichi (Orsha district), and the St. Paraskeva Fair in Parichi (Bobruisk district). Large forest fairs took place in Minsk and Gomel. The former focused on trade with Germany, while the latter served the needs of timber traders of Southern Russia.

The 1897 census revealed that trade was the most frequent professional occupation among Jews. 38.65% of the active Jewish population was engaged in trade, whereas throughout the Russian empire this number was 3.77%. Among the urban population this ratio was 37.48% among Jews and 12.42% among other ethnicities. In total, 618,926 persons in the Russian empire were engaged in trade, including 450,427 Jews (72.8%). The number of Jews engaged in trade constituted 31.97% in the North-Western provinces, 39.04% – in the Kingdom of Poland, 43.14% – in the South-Western provinces, and 45.5% – in the South-Eastern provinces.[25]

By the end of the 19th century the role of Jewish merchants had increased remarkably in Belarus. Most Jewish merchants lived in the provinces of Mohilev (30.3%) and Minsk (29%).[26] In the towns of Babinovichi, Gorodok, Druya, Klimovichi, Kopys, Lepel, Nesvizh, Pruzhany, Slutsk and Radoshkovichi all local merchants were Jews.[27]

Several issues put the brakes on Jewish trade in Belarus in the 18th – early 20th centuries. The Pale of Settlement, introduced in 1791, considerably increased competition among Jewish traders. In addition, the imperial legislation on Jews was changeable and inconsistent. Beyond the Pale, Jewish merchants, manufacturers and craftsmen could conduct business affairs only during their short-time visits. In addition, the 1804 Regulation on Jews required them to leave rural areas within 3-4 years. They also were banned from keeping taverns and renting estates to prevent the alleged alcoholism and exploitation of local peasants. The banishment started in 1807.[28] In 1809 a special commission was created to investigate the facts of Jewish residency in the rural areas. In its report the commission underlined,

> as long as the Belarusian and Polish landlords keep the current economic system based on the sale of wine, as long as the landlords in a manner patronize drunkenness, this evil will be growing from year to year and no efforts could decrease it. Hence, the consequences will be the same, no matter whether a Jew or a Christian is involved into the sale of wine.[29]

In the commission's view, Jews did not inflict harm to the rural settlements. On the contrary, being suppliers of goods and intermediaries between the rural and urban areas, they made a positive contribution to the development of villages. However, Alexander I did not approve the report of the commission.

The 1804 regulation on the right of Jews to receive trading certificates for trade and industrial activities only within the Pale of Settlement was confirmed by the 1824 law. Moreover, it also forbade Jewish and all visiting merchants to sell their goods from their homes or to deliver them to places of temporary residence beyond the Pale of Settlement. The breach of this law was subject to forfeiture.

Jewish merchants were allowed to perform wholesale and retail store trade. However, the bourgeois Jews were banned from carrying out wholesale trade beyond the Pale of Settlement, even if they were estate managers for the nobility. Similarly, it was forbidden to sell the agricultural goods brought from the Pale of Settlement by order of the noblemen. Regulations on the arrival of Jews to the cities in the interior provinces (adopted on May 25, 1827), confirmed previous restrictions and supplemented them with the prohibition of retail sales and setting up new manufacturing beyond the borders of the Pale. Yielding to the economic realities, the 1835 regulation allowed for the presence of the Jewish merchants and manufacturers in Riga and at the main fairs held in the interior provinces to do temporary trade there. Moreover, Jews were granted certain rights to sell goods beyond the Pale of Settlement.[30] All subsequent legal acts of the Russian empire related to the status of Jewish merchants and traders were aimed at either imposing restrictions on the freedom of trade, or at their partial easing. These measures applied both to Russian and foreign citizens of Jewish ethnicity since 1859 Jewish top guild merchants were allowed to reside on the territory of the whole Russian empire.

In the environment of economic discrimination against Jews, only individual representatives of this community could rise to the top level in trade. As Olga Sobolevskaya and Volodymyr Goncharov argue,

> membership in the guild meant payment of the relevant fees and the availability of capital. Only few could be modest about this achievement. Statistics of Grodna province consistently dispel the myth of the rich Jew. In 1886 Jews made 84% of all merchants in Grodna province. However, they mostly belonged to the third guild, as its share comprised two thirds of the total turnover. The average turnover of a Jewish merchant was approximately three times less than that of a non-Jew.[31]

While analyzing the Jewish trade in Minsk, Pinsk and Bobruisk in the 1870-80s, Andrei Subbotin noted that,

> turnovers of the Jews in these cities were higher than in the rest of the province. On the contrary, turnovers of the Christian merchants were smaller. Moreover, being older centres of trade with quays, Bobruisk and Pinsk had more large Jewish capitalists. For example, in Minsk there were no more than seven or eight capitalists with the capital value of 100,000 rubles or more. In Pinsk their number comprised ten or more. Non-Jewish merchants were more active in the districts than in Minsk. Thus, they controlled the whole trade of pork fat; some sold hemp, cattle. In Minsk there were only three Christian stores.[32]

The average trade profitability in Minsk and its district composed 8-10% of the turnover for Jewish sellers and at least 10% for their Christian counterparts.[33] The following table provides the data on the number of top and second guild merchant certificates issued in Minsk province in the 1870-80s[34]:

The number of top and second guild merchant certificates issued in Minsk province				
Year	Jews	non-Jews	Total	% of Jews
1876	252	28	280	90
1880	366	6	372	98
1884	519	115	634	83
1886	563	78	641	88

Discourse on the topic has suggested that Jews took control on the entire local trade, but the official figures contradict this view. The share of the Jewish merchants in the trade of Minsk province was declining. The official figures confirm that 820 guild certificates were issued in 1884 in Minsk province. The share of Jews among them was 562 or 68.55%. Hence, it is obvious that the Jews squeezed their competitors only in small-scale trade, while they were gradually driven out from merchant trade.[35]

Into the early 20th century

Belarusian Jews played an important role not only in foreign and domestic trade of the Belarusian lands, but the whole Russian empire. Jews controlled almost all the grain trade in the North-Western territory. They exported grain abroad through Odessa, Kherson, Nikolaev and the Baltic Sea ports. The Jews bought grain from the manufacturers and sold it to Russian distilleries and residents of the Russian cities.

As Iosif M. Bikerman observed,

> according to 1897 census, in the North-Western territory among every 1,000 persons engaged in trade 886 were Jews, while in grain trade the number of Jews reached 930. This meant that almost all grain trade in this territory was in Jewish hands... The Russian grain trade, which had major importance for the country's economy, ...became an integral part of the global commercial relations. ...For that the country is indebted mainly to the Jews, who accomplished this difficult and important business despite all obstacles in the path of their activities.[36]

Jewish merchants sharply raised grain purchase prices. As a result, its producers (i.e. local farmers and landowners) benefited, which resulted in general agricultural growth in the Russian empire.

In 1906 the Minsk Timber Stock Exchange was created by the local timber merchants. Its primary focus was timber trade. In 1912 it was transformed to the General Commodity Stock Exchange and its overall trade volume reached 10 million rubles.[37] Timber played one of the most important roles in the Jewish trade. Jewish historians observed that

> timber was both one of the largest sectors of the Jewish trade and one of the most remarkable in terms capital aggregation.[38]

The Jewish timber trade in Belarus had three geographical directions. A significant part of the Belarusian timber was transported to the unforested Southern provinces via the Dnieper waterway. The other part was delivered to the markets of Poland and Germany by land. Finally, the third part was brought to the Baltic ports for export by sea.

The intensive growth of the Jewish timber trade started in the 1860-70s and was linked with the abolishment of serfdom. As a result of this decision, numerous landlords brought their estates and forests to the market. Timber trade was particularly intense in the five provinces of the North-Western territory, as Jews there sometimes got forests together with the estates.

In his autobiography *Trial and Error*, Chaim Weizmann, the Belarus-born first president of

the State of Israel, recalled the organization of the timber trade by his father:

> The timber trade was the mainstay of Motol. My father was a "transportierer." He cut and hauled the timber and got it floated down to Danzig... My father would set out for the heart of the forest, twenty or twenty-five miles away. His only communication with home was the sleight road, which was always subject to interruption... [T]here were wolves in the forests and occasionally robbers. Fortunately, there was, between my father and the fifty or sixty men he employed seasonally – moujiks of Motol and the neighborhood – an excellent relationship, primitive, but warm and patriarchal. Once or twice he was attacked by robbers, but they were beaten off by his workmen. It was hard, exacting work, but on the whole my father did not dislike it, perhaps because it called for a considerable degree of skill. It was his business to mark out the trees to be felled... He has to supervise the hauling... After Passover began the spring and summer work, the floating of the rafts to the sea.[39]

In early 20th century the Jewish Encyclopedia reported,

> the linen trade has considerable importance for the Jewish population of the North-Western territory. It is concentrated mainly in the provinces of Vitebsk and Kovna, and in the adjacent areas. Linen is exported abroad and partly to the factories in Russia. In the cities of the Pale of Settlement Jews formed the majority of those engaged in the linen trade.[40]

Thus, Jews prevailed among traders in Belarusian cities and towns. Contemporaries that had smarts, curiosity, a business mindset and a knowledge of human psychology helped them in their business activities. Christians merchants were limited in their actions and decisions by the guild regulations and did not have much experience in commercial affairs. Therefore, they could not compete with entrepreneurially-inclined Jewish merchants. However, Jews did not monopolize trading activity and were not engaged in it en masse, as is sometimes argued. Only about a third of the Jewish population lived off the trade and the vast majority of them traded for pennies. At the same time, the Jewish trade significantly contributed to the economic development of the Belarusian lands in the late 18th - early 20th centuries.

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Mobility as a phenomenon of Jewish culture in the Belarusian part of Jewish Pale of Settlement from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century

Olga Sobolevskaya

The text is focused on defining the role of mobility in the Jewish culture in the Belarusian part of Jewish Pale of Settlement (end of 18th – beginning of 20th century). Based on archival sources and memoir literature, the article analyzes the essence of relations between the Czarist administration's attitudes to the high degree of mobility of the Jewish population, as well as the policy of compulsory deportations within the boundaries of Belarusian provinces. The mobile nature of the Jewish people had largely defined the life of the Pale of Settlement. Based on this characteristic, Jews were able to connect the various parts of economy (agriculture, trade, crafts, and finance) and localities (urban and rural settlements), to generate economic impetus to the agricultural civilization by introducing innovations, and to support the development of trade and services. The article concludes that the Jewish community's mobility strengthened the discrimination of Jews as an ethno-confessional minority, while their "love of changing places" occupied an important place in the development of negative ethnic stereotypes concerning Jews, in the Christians' consciousness.

The migration context of Jewish history within the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire is rarely a subject of special research. Typically, the researchers accept the tendency of representatives of this ethnic and religious community to change residence, as a well-known fact, not requiring special proof and attention. They, therefore, focus on analysis of Russia's policy toward Jews, such as forced relocation, or on the economic consequences of their migration (for example, purchasing grain from farmers or tavern owning in the countryside). Meanwhile, "the wandering condition" of Jews in the Belarusian part of the Pale of Settlement at the end of 18th - the beginning of the 20th century is an important cultural and historical circumstance for the Jews themselves, as well as for their neighbors, and for the Russian administration.

For Jews, the endless wanderings were a part of the myth of dispersal from the Promised Land and *Galut* – the punishment for the sins embodied in a traveling life, far away from the historical homeland, either forever or until the coming of Messiah. According to Alexander Militarev,

> the attention that the Bible focuses on Jewish movements is as extremely high as is the importance of these movements. The topic of exile and dispersion is one of the dominant ones in the Hebrew Bible.[1]

Forced mobility became a firmly established part of the self-perception of Jews as a historical community and their particular way of life. *Galut* in the Jewish tradition has always had very negative connotations.

For the neighbors of the Jews within the Pale of Settlement, the Jewish wanderings became one of the features of their "otherness," so unlike the features of the stable agricultural civilization, the majority of whom were ordinary peasants. The journey from the village to the fair in the neighboring small town became an epic event, while the town itself was perceived as the edge of the world. Another lifestyle identified with the world of money (agency, trade, usury) and with moving about, amplified the image of Jews as "aliens," and therefore as "odd," and sometimes even dangerous.

Olga Belova, who studies ethnic stereotypes, wrote that among the folk stories about biblical events told by peasants within the Pale of Settlement. a special place with the help of the Imperial Post world for the Jews, just like for the Gypsies, with whom they share a common destiny, the lack of "their land."[2] The reluctance of Jews to live like everyone else, to cultivate the land, their tendency toward the urban "easy, buy-and-sell life," coupled with wandering and deception, has become a part of the negative ethnic stereotype.[3]

The tendency toward migration, shown by its Jewish citizens, concerned the Imperial administration at all levels. At the end of the 18th century, Derzhavin's Reports contributed to the creation in the minds of the ruling class in Russia an image of a "fanatical" Jewish citizen who has built "a state within a state" and pursues his own separate interest, as opposed to the common Russian one.

Starting in the early 19th century, each time when an external threat or internal instability occurred, the imperial authorities, not confident in the loyalty of Jews, took special measures to uncover traitors within this community. It was believed that the

mobility of the Jewish community created conditions for espionage in favor of the enemy.

The documents from State archive of the Russian Federation confirm that in March 1812 the Governor of the border province of Grodna was ordered to “surreptitiously” watch those Jews, who appeared in the province, and with the help of the Imperial Post to have an eye out on their correspondence.[4]

This stereotype of the disloyal citizen has resulted in the limitation of the Jewish habitat in Belarusian provinces. In 1812, during a three week period, wandering Jews were moved from the border zone into *kahals* to which they were assigned. These actions were systematically repeated until 1821.[5] The statistics from 1820-30s clearly show that about 200,000 Jews were deported from their villages at this time. This number constituted no less than 20% of Belarusian Jews.[6]

The Senate Decree of 30 June 1825 again ordered the removal of Jews from the border areas, but it was not successful. In 1831 the Chief of the Special Corps of Gendarmes Alexander von Benckendorff received a report from Grodna that “the Decree of the Governing Senate was disregarded in the Grodna province and no measures to activate it have been taken so far.”[7] The Gendarmes Colonel Vlasov said that he knew 30 Jews from Grodna who had regularly crossed the border into the Kingdom of Poland with expired passports. According to the colonel, either espionage, or smuggling activities were behind the border crossings. He explained to the Vilna Governor-General Prince Yuri Dolgorukov that military actions of 1830-31 made the border control ineffective: suspicious persons, and many Jews among them, traveled from Russia to the Kingdom of Poland and back, quite freely, without an external passport. It was sufficient to have a pass from the squadron or company commander, stationed in the Avgustov province. Local residents got used to seeing this move as something completely normal.[8]

The 1835 Regulation on Jews again prohibited them from residing within 50 *versts* (a Russian unit of distance equal to 1.067 kilometers – BR) from the border.[9] However, the documents from the late 1830s show that these eviction measures had been unsuccessful. In 1838, the chief of the Grodna border district admitted to have been unable to stop the illegal migration and the bribery of local police:

> Numerous investigations have shown, that the deported Jews after some time returned to their former place of residence. If they are again located, all traces of these facts disappear, because of the influence on the local police.[10]

Under the rule of Czar Nicholas I, the Cabinet of Ministers returned to the issue of removing the Jews from the area of 50 *versts* from the Prussian border. Within two years, they were required to sell their houses and leave, but in 1844 this grace period was prolonged by another two years.

Forced migrants were promised tax exemption for five years, but the issue of compensation for loss of industrial enterprises was not resolved. The main concern of the authorities in 1850s was smuggling in the border areas, and it was the Jews who were “declared to be” guilty. Albeit, the provincial treasury lacked the money for the resettlement.[11] This process dragged on until 1858, when a decree by Alexander II allowed Jews to remain in the border area, if they were assigned to local *kahals*.[12]

With the outbreak of World War I, the spy-phobia turned into a mass hysteria. According to the head of the Grodna provincial gendarmerie:

> Many young and old Jews spy for the Germans and Austrians. They have very good opinion about the Jewish spies, who, in the meantime, are likely to be working for both sides.[13]

Under particular suspicion fell those who regularly traveled abroad on commercial grounds before the war. They had contacts in Germany that could be used to create a spy network by the enemy.[14] Therefore, just in case,

> all Jews who have returned from the enemy countries, and are suspected of their reliability, should be sent to the Tomsk province.[15]

The citizens of the Russian empire, were, in turn, considered as potential spies by Germany.[16] Jews, who had been holidaying in German spas, had already been interned by the end of July 1914. They were isolated in city parks and fortress grounds, lacking basic living conditions and adequate food. Later, the Jews were taken to Russia by freight trains, suffering from hunger, prevented from getting out at the stations and even from approaching the freight car windows.[17]

As the front lines approached, the Russian military administration restricted the free movement of Jews in the territory of the Pale. On September 20, 1915 the commander of the Third Army banned the relocation of Jews from one town or city to another, with the exception of those who were ready to move eastward (i.e. as refugees).[18] Jews near the front line were robbed, humiliated,

raped and even killed by soldiers from both sides. Again, the way turned to a symbol of suffering for Belarusian Jews:

> The attitude toward the migrants in the villages along the way was hostile. In many places, the locals came out to meet the Jews with clubs, preventing their entry into the villages. This happened in the village of Sutkovo (6-7 km from Smorgon), where the peasants beat the refugees with sticks.[19]

The basis for the beginning of the forced migration of Jews in the 19th century had not only political, but also economic considerations. In early 19th century the Jewish moneylenders and innkeepers were accused in the impoverishment of the peasants, resulting in the 1804 Regulation on Jews which proscribed the eviction of Jewish citizens from the countryside to the cities and towns within a period of three years. In 1809, in the Minsk province alone, 6,290 Jews were ordered to relocate.[20]

One can imagine the overpopulation of Belarusian small towns as the result of these policies. Just within the Nesvizh lands owned by Count Dominik Radziwiłł, Jewish families had to leave 142 villages and 30 inns. More than 90% of these migrants chose Nesvizh as their new place to live.[21]

The relocation of 60,000 families within the Pale became an impossible task, as evidenced by the order sent to the Grodna Governor Kazimir Grabowski, dated September, 2 1819, by the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education. This order was intended to stop the eviction.[22] In 1835, however, the government of Nicholas I returned to the idea of resettlement of Jews from the villages. Some police officers interpreted the government's orders to mean, that if the Jews could be present only in cities and towns, they were not allowed to leave their borders.

As a result, the police in 1843 in the Mohilev province organized a veritable hunt for the Jews that came with their grain to the mills located in villages , or just appeared in a village on business. The policemen, as well as the peasants were ordered to detain the Jews and bring them to the local district court. Following the complaints by the Jewish elders from Mohilev, a special clarification was issued by the chancellery of the Chief of Gendarmes which ordered these abuses to stop.[23]

After the liberal reign of Alexander II who in 1864 abolished all the laws that had prevented Jews to trade or "engage in business" beyond the urban settlements, the discriminatory "May Laws" of 1882 reinstated another form of abuse toward the peddlers. By imposing a ban to sell real property to Jews in the villages, it prevented them from legalizing their residence in the countryside.[24] Provincial authorities oversaw each case of acquisition of houses by the Jews outside of the urban areas. Peasants filed numerous collective petitions to the governors' offices which informed the authorities about the facts of illegal residence by Jewish families in their villages.

Needless to say, these actions were usually financially motivated, as the peasants owed debts to a Jewish innkeeper or trader. The simplest solution was the removal of a Jew from the village, so he could not reclaim the money owed. In addition, the authorities saw the wandering of Jews as the cause of "disorder" and lack of control over a large segment of the population.

The imperial administration was concerned about the possibility of tax evasion by the wandering Jews. Therefore, in 1830s, the Jews assigned to *kahals* in the Grodna province were periodically removed from the Belostok region and brought to the places of their "permanent residence," while those from the Belostok region were similarly deported from the urban areas of the Grodna province.[25]

A transition to the category of agricultural workers allowed Belarusian Jews in the 19th century to legally live in the countryside. The foundation of the Jewish agricultural colonies within the Pale of Settlement, and later in New Russia (*Novorossiya*) gave rise to another wave of migration. In the first phase the possibility of colonization of Siberia was announced. However, an excessive presence of "suspicious subjects" (prisoners and settlers) in these areas forced the authorities to redirect the future farmers to the Ekaterinoslav and Kherson provinces. New Russia had offered good conditions for the development of Jewish colonization[26], but in the Pale of Settlement this idea quickly declined.

As the result, the number of Jewish beggars on the roads of Belarus increased. They turned to searching for odd jobs and begging. Belarusian Jews demonstrated cautious enthusiasm for prospects to radically change their place of residence. While choosing between agricultural colonies within the Pale (especially on the territory of the province of their residence) and those in the New Russia, Jews usually opted for the former.[27]

Numerous legal restrictions, including that of moving to the central provinces of the Russian empire, immediately disappeared, if one renounced his/her Jewish religion. Anyone who was baptized, could select a new first and last name, and a place

of residence. The convert's card of the Minsk province confirmed that

> the bearer has converted to the Greek-Russian faith, is heading for different cities of the Russian empire, wherever he wishes, in search for an authorized way of life.[28]

However, studies of archival documents indicated that a neophyte usually remained in the province, where he/she had lived prior to the conversion.[29]

Passports for traveling abroad appear to be a useful source for the study of motives of Belarusian Jews to take foreign trips. A report from the Grodna customs office showed that trade was the main purpose of crossing the border in 1820: seven Jews went to Prussia (Königsberg) and six to Saxony (Leipzig). To buy goods, the residents of Grodna went to the Kingdom of Poland, which becane known for the development of the consumer industry. They also went to the Vilna province "on financial matters." The owners of printing houses needed to go to the Kingdom of Poland to buy equipment and to expand their sales network.[30]

It is worth noting that the first printing house in Hrodna owes its foundation to a Jewish migrant Nokhim Gizer, invited from Saxony at the end of the 18th century by Antoni Tyzenhaus, the Treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[31]

Trading in Russian major cities was the sphere of specialization for wealthy entrepreneurs. Starting in 1835, the merchants of the top and second guild, having a governor's permission, could briefly visit Moscow and Saint Petersburg in order to pursue trade and financial activities there. One of the wealthiest Jewish residents of Grodna, Mendel Sobol, received such permission in 1842.[32] Special passports, defining the purpose of the visit, were introduced in 1855 for Jews entering Riga. M.L. Gurvich from Slonim (Grodna province) was reported among the violators of the new regime.[33]

In 1908, a number of 2nd guild merchants from Brest (Grodna province) went abroad on business. Among them were timber suppliers Leizer-Zelman B. Tennenbaum and Sakhar L. Blankensteyn, as well as Khatsel-Meer H. Orkhov, who was engaged in vinegar trade.[34] Other residents of Brest, like the sugar trader Iosel A. Berlin and the cattle dealer Shaya M.-S. Frydlender, took multiple business trips abroad.[35]

Trading was the reason for the entire family of Brest herring traders to apply for international passports: the elderly parents were assisted by their three children (25-year-old Tanhum, 24-year-old Rokhlya and 23-year-old Masha). The list of documents also included a notarized letter issued by the head of the family to his wife. The text of this document was typical of its kind and looked less like a document, but rather like a letter from Romeo to Juliet:

> My dearest wife Rivka! This notarized letter empowers you to manage all my activities, wherever they may took place: to buy and sell, using cash, checks or credit; according to your own judgment, to manage all my movable and immovable property; employ and dismiss warehouse clerks and laborers, using your own judgment; to issue bills, receive money and transfers on my behalf; place signatures; sue on my behalf… and in general act and manage my business in everything you find necessary; I accept everything you or your attorney will do, I will not dispute it.[36]

The financial interests of the top guild merchant family which owned a banking office required Cecilia Y. Eliasheva to go "to different cities abroad." She was authorized by her husband to travel and conduct all activities on his behalf.[37] Not only the foreign, but also the domestic trade called for continuous travels. These included travel to rural locations, from one fair to another, for bringing manufactured goods or imported goods to Central Russia. For example, the Mohilev merchants frequently visited the cities of the Smolensk and Moscow provinces.[38]

As Heiko Haumann, the classic of German Judaica emphasized, one cannot ignore the special role of Jewish merchants' influence on the culture of the Pale. Thus, the traders, who went from door to door, played a significant role as cultural intermediaries between the town and the countryside."[39] They distributed not only products, but also news, contributed to the formation of public opinion and the dissemination of innovations.

Jews, in general, often traveled because of "the corporate needs." A significant place in the traditional employment structure belonged to coachmen, an occupation that made a person spend much of his life "on wheels." Many coachmen were in the service of the magnates.

To meet the needs of their realm, the Radziwiłłs hired certain coachmen who transported goods, firewood and passengers (officials in the magnate's service, Czarist officials, and the Count Dominik Radziwiłł himself).[40] There were those who were hired on a permanent basis, for example, Efraim Shlomovich was under contract from 1805 to 1806. He received a food ration, clothing, and a salary of 120 złotys.[41] As seen in the docu-

ments of the Committee on the Arrangement of Jews headed by of P.D. Kiselyov:

> Many Jews are engaged in carting. They are neither afraid of the distance, nor of the type of crew, nor time of the year. They only stop for the Sabbath for a day, wherever they happen to be. They are skilled in riding horses, they ride up to 80 *versts* a day and sometimes more, depending on the condition of the roads. They ask for a very reasonable fee.[42]

Technical progress of the second half of 19th century limited the opportunities for the growth of this type of activities. As the Jewish historian Ilya Orshansky correctly noted,

> with the expansion of steam navigation and railways, a great number of Jews involved in the carting business were losing their livelihood.[43]

Among the professions related to travel, there was a difficult job of a rafter, performed by many Jews who lived along the large rivers. Władysław Syrokomla in the famous *Wędrówki po moich niegdyś okolicach* (Journeys through my former environs) wrote about life in Stolbtsy on the river Nioman:

> burgers [work] as steersmen and rafters. During the summer, quiet and emptiness reign here, in the autumn and winter – the bustle and the noise characteristic of the grain pier, where the children of Israel almost entirely dominate.[44]

Jewish rafters were entrusted to transport goods, produced on the magnates' estates, to the external market, by water. As the documents from the Tyzenhaus Archive show, it was Orel Jakubovič in 1783 who was responsible for the delivery of rye from the Tyzenhaus estate to the Baltic ports.[45]

Many Jews were agents who often travelled to meet their principal's needs and actually were his "regular spies." At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries on the estates of the Radziwiłł family, Jews organized production, hired service staff on behalf of the Count, and often traveled to other cities, for example, from Nesvizh and Olyka to Brody, Lemberg and Zhitomir. Such was the case of Merka, Radziwiłł's agent in 1810-1811.[46]

In his memoirs Nikolai Voronov recalled a Jew, known as the Moldovan, who for a year was a police executor's agent. Together with his principal he visited the landlords, priests and other people, conducting searches and accepting bribes from the landlords. For his loyalty the policeman "repaid" his undesirable witness: he accused the Moldovan of theft and sent him to prison.[47]

Sometimes, members of professions which should have been associated with a stable lifestyle, had to travel. Among them were the craftsmen. In the overpopulated towns and cities of the Pale of Settlement, at least half of the Jewish population was engaged in crafts and it was often difficult for them to find customers. Therefore, some found a way through seasonal travels. For example, a Jewish tailor stayed for a few weeks in a village. He made overcoats for all who needed them, and then continued his "business trip." This phenomenon was consistent with the spirit of the era of developed capitalism. As Heiko Haumann observed,

> the middleman function of the Jews got complicated, it was not just the traders, but also the wandering craftsmen that were on the lookout for customers.[48]

At the beginning of the rapid capitalization of Belarusian economy, many Jews who were engaged in providing services for the aristocrats' estates, lost their former sources of income. The situation in the Vitebsk province in the late 1870s was described in the Jewish journal *Rassvet* (Dawn),

> Prior to the latest Polish uprising [of 1863 – OS], and the liberation of peasants and the construction of railways, many residents earned agency commissions from generous landlords. Quite a significant number were engaged in buying agricultural products in the villages or working as coachmen, providing transportation for passengers and luggage in covered wagons. Now, all of these aging commission earners, factors and retired *balahulas* [coachmen], have lost their former livelihoods and became beggars. They go in long lines with their wives and children from house to house, asking for alms.[49]

Beggars formed another category of people who spent most of their life on the road. This negative social phenomenon affected people of all ages.

In the late 1860s the Grodna Governor General Dmitri Kropotkin drew attention to the spread of poverty among the Jewish children. In groups, they roamed all over the city and spent nights under the open sky.[50] The administration noted in 1881that

> it almost does not encounter Jewish poverty, although it exists on a large scale. Jewish enterprises have reduced this misery, but a time may come when wide-scale charity campaigns by the wealthy Jews, focused on their brothers, will be powerless in handling the pauperism among the Jews.[51]

Abram Paperna, author of memoirs about the lifestyle of Belarusian Jews in the middle of the

19th century, describes poverty as a real disaster for the town of Kopyl where he was born. He wrote that

> they wandered in bands, with their wives and children. Every day, especially in the lean years, one can see dozens of beggars, who visited all houses without exception, for alms.[52]

He further admits that it was impossible to refuse, as the Jewish paupers did not ask, but rather demanded alms, as if they insisted on repayment of a debt. If the houseowners did not dispense alms, the paupers cursed them.

Talented students also spent a lot of time on the road. They did not confine themselves to the basic knowledge of the Torah and the Talmud, and continued their education in the famous yeshivas, for example, in Mir and Volozhin. In her memoirs Polina Vengerova dedicated a few lines to this phenomenon:

> In his teens, such a young man started to move about. A teenager remained in the yeshiva as long as he wanted. No one prevented him to look for another school, to listen to other teachers, to become acquainted with other theses and comments, because Talmudic studies, as seen by the Jews of that time, were as mysterious as the seabottom. In a new place a *bocher* [student of the yeshiva – OS] learned about other people, other habits and customs. The trip was lengthy and very difficult. In the summer, he traveled light and barefoot, and sometimes a lucky break came, when a coachman and took him to a village, where he could find temporary accommodations.[53]

High authority in traditional scholarship of famous yeshivas attracted Jewish students not only from the remote regions of the Russian empire, but also from abroad. The Mir yeshiva was famous even in the United States. According the memoirs to rabbi Judah Broyde which cover the interwar period,

> its student body consisted mainly of Russian and Polish students, about forty Americans, about forty Germans, ten Englishmen, three Irish, two French, three Canadians, two Swedes, two were from Denmark, three – from Belgium, one – from South Africa, one or two Jews from Palestine, one Czechoslovak and one Austrian. One can say that we practically had the League of Nations there.[54]

Although his memoirs cover the 1930s, one can perhaps generalize that this “international” aspect was also a feature of the Mir yeshiva at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries.

Pilgrimage was another reason for travel for Belarusian Jews of the Pale of Settlement. “To make a bow to God” was the reason for the whole families to travel. Among these pilgrims there were H. Zuts from Krynki who traveled with his wife and 7-year-old daughter; L.M. Aronzon from Brest who took his wife, son and daughter-in-law with him; B.M. Karalicki from Slonim, accompanied by his wife and 10-year-old daughter; or Sh. H. Kustaf from Grodna together with his family members. A trip to the Holy Land was not necessarily a manifestation of wealth. Among the aforementioned families only the Kustaf merchant family could be proud about their significant assets.[55]

The pilgrimage tradition was not interrupted in the early 20th century. According to the documents from the Hrodna archive, among those who went to Jerusalem in 1908 were the burgher family of the Shtadlens from Brest with their 18-year old daughter and 15-year-old son; Yankel (78 years old) and Dvosha Stein (62); Tevel-Volf and Sora-Yitka Nakdymons from the village of Indura (Grodna district) with their 7-year-old daughter Bobka.[56] It is noteworthy that also the elderly undertook this dangerous and long journey. It can be assumed that those rather old people did not expect to return to the Russian empire and more likely dreamed to end their earthly days in the Holy Land and to be buried there. This was seen as a great honor for each person. It is known that Jewish communities of the Pale even collected money for people who went to Jerusalem to spend there the last days of their lives.

The archival documents rarely name the reason that caused Jews to leave the Pale of Settlement. Perhaps the blurred formulation “for his own needs” found in passport of Slonim Jew B.I. Yatvinski, who in 1856 reached the fortress of Nalchik in the Northern Caucasus, should be interpreted as commercial activities or agency. However, his passion to change places could have had sad consequences, as his document had expired. This would have made him a beggar who according to the law, would have been conscripted out of turn.[57]

It is also not very clear how a tradesman Israel-Michel Rubinovich from a borough of Horodets (Grodna province) came to Paris. When he renounced his Russian citizenship in 1887, he had already been living in France for about 30 years and received his doctoral degree. By that time all his relatives in the Pale had died and the locals did not even remember him.[58]

In the 1880s fate drew some natives of Belarus to southern and central parts of the Russian empire. I. G. Fishbukh moved from Grodna to Kherson where he retained his burgher status.[59]

In general, Belarusian Jews often came up with the idea to go south for work. The Kapulskis from Dombrova and the Zubals from Grodna went in the late 1880s to Odessa.[60]

In the second half of the 19th century, there was an exodus of so-called "Nicholas' soldiers" from the Pale of Settlement. During their 25-year conscription term, these people had lost contact with relatives and feared of being accused of departure from tradition. Many used the opportunity granted by the authorities in 1867 to settle in anywhere in the Russian Empire, after ending their military service. Some stayed where they served in the army, since the "internal provinces" faced a shortage of artisans and merchants. For example, K.A. Elin, a former resident of the borough of Skidel, who served in the Crimean regiment, chose Kishinev in the province of Bessarabia. The south attracted him more than his native Grodna province, despite the fact that there he also "had no occupation and had to struggle with hunger."[61]

In the middle of the 19th century foreign travel for recreation was a rare phenomenon. It was a sign of the actual wealth and belonging to the Western culture. Journeys "for the waters" to Cranz (today: Zelenogradsk in the Kaliningrad province of Russia – BR) and Franzensbad (today: Františkovy Lázně in the Czech Republic – BR) was a evident characteristic of "worldliness combined with religiosity and the German level of culture" of the mother-in-law of the aforementioned memoirist Abram Paperna. Being a Jewess from Courland, she, according to Paperna, was "an exceptional woman."[62] Visiting foreign spas became a typical feature of life of the Jewish capitalist and intellectual elites in the second half of the 19th century. The famous German mineral water spas were the most common travel destinations for entire families.[63] Jews also traveled abroad for medical treatment. In 1908 the Marshaks from Shchuchin transported their sick brother abroad for an operation, while brothers Berka and Iosif Shternberg from Brest arranged organized a similar trip for their sister Rivka.[64] In 1914 I.G. Reznikovsky with his wife stayed in the clinic of Berlin University.[65]

Not just ill health, but also family problems may have led to foreign travels. As archival documents show, in the beginning of the 20th century some abandoned women were forced to go to Europe to search for their diasappeared husbands. In 1908 this was the case of two women from Slonim – Zlata Sh. Lampert (39-year-old) with four small children and Maita H. Vovpin (43-year-old) with two sons and five daughters. The fate of their husbands was unknown. Being neither widows, nor divorced, they could not get married again. So, they started on a journey.[66]

What were the means of travel used by the Jews of the Pale? The vast majority traveled by land. Merchants used wagons, agricultural dealers drove carts, while poor itinerant craftsmen and merchants, wandering *maggids* (Jewish itinerant preachers – BR), yeshiva students and beggars usually walked. Mode of transport was chosen according to the financial possibilities and its availability. For instance, Arkady Kovner spent his last 15 kopecks to ride 24 *versts* from Mir to Stolbtsy in a cart, for three days he rode in a *balagola*'s wagon from Kovna to Suvalki, and from there for another three days – to Grodna. This trip was a real challenge for human health and patience. Kovner vividly described the night on the road, when a wagon covered with bast, which did not protect the passenger from rain, came under a deluge in the dark woods:

> I experienced such moments for the first time, and it seemed to me that the very punitive terrible God of Israel was chasing me personally for running away from my wife and for the intent to become corrupted by European education.[67]

As he further noted, instead of a four-hour ride from Vilna to Grodna, he spent five days on the road.[68] The reason of this was not his poverty (since he used a train from Vilna to Kovna to cover the first part of his journey), but the poor connectivity of the railways in the 1860s.

The wealthy could afford more comfort. The memories of Polina Vengerova provide a description of the carriage, which she as daughter of a wealthy merchant used to travel together with her parents from Brest to Konotop, where her fiance awaited her. The carriage looked like

> a long, leather-upholstered cart, the so-called "furgon" with small windows with curtains. It was drawn by three postal horses. ...The carriage was fully equipped inside and outside, since we had to travel for 14 days. We took a large amount of baked goods, smoked ham and pickles, a box of brandy, rum, vodka, wine, tea and sugar. That should been enough for all... Five seats were comfortably equipped for passengers.[69]

The journey lasted a week and was stopping only on Sabbath.

As Ina Sorkina had observed, the pre-reform Belarus had roads of relatively good quality. A comprehensive road construction took place here, and this experience was then applied in the other regions of the Russian Empire.[70] Inciden-

tally, this contributed to the development of road infrastructure – inns and postal stations with their modest but necessary travel services. Thousands of Jews were users of these accommodations.

Trade with foreign countries was carried out mainly by water. Salt was brought to Grodna by Nioman barges; timber was floated on this river to Prussia.[71] Goods were transported from and through Belarus to the Ukrainian provinces by Dnieper. In the Mohilev province goods and passenger transportation was available on rivers Sož, Dnieper, Druć, and Biarezina. In the province of Vitebsk the same services were provided on the Dzvina/Daugava. Construction of canals (Ahinski, Pinsk, Dnieper-Buh, Augustów) which connected of the main rivers, contributed to the development of trade. The Grodna province was in the best position:

> Rivers, coursing through its territory were a part of the three river systems: Nioman, Buh, and Prypiać; The first two systems belonged to the Baltic Sea basin, while the third – to the Black Sea basin. In total, there were 15 navigable and 14 rafting rivers, and three major canals in the province.[72]

Various means of transport were used on these waterways: barges, wherries, schooners, Russian boats, galleys, and other types.

The technological progress has contributed to the increase of migration level. The first steamship navigated the river Sož in 1824. According to Andrei Kishtymov, in the pre-reform period there was total of 20 steamships on Belarusian waterways.[73] The growth of railway networks in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries provided alternative means of transportation. Although the overall impact of railways construction was ambiguous for the Belarusian economy (as Zakhar Shybeka has shown, it was conducted first of all in compliance with political and strategic interests, and thus destroying the traditional network of trade routes and even leading to the demise of some cities and towns)[74], this comfortable and fast way to cover long distances became very popular among many Jews, regardless their social status.

An interesting document confirms that in the first half of the 19th century, there were Jews who offered their services in the organization of foreign travels. In 1827, a Jew called Avsey Rozen drove through the Grodna customs "transporting a group of Jews who were traveling for business purposes."[75] These services became especially popular in the second half of the 19th century. The difficult economic situation, legal restrictions and heavy moral atmosphere of Antisemitism led to an increase in emigration. According to Emmanuil Ioffe, from 1881 to 1906 1,236,161 Jews went abroad from the Russian empire. According to US data, from June 1897 to July 1915 1,108,000 Jews immigrated. Within 20 years (1897-1917) 53,000 Jewish immigrants left Mohilev province, 53,000 – Vilna province, 47,000 – Vitebsk province, 73,000 – Grodna province, and 91,000 – Minsk province.[76] The author of the article calls himself "a Jewish emigrant" from Minsk and lists unemployment and poverty as the main reasons for the emigration of Jews abroad. A. Sudarsky described the economic situation in the Jewish *shetls* in the following way:

> Emigration concerns all social strata that exist in our towns. Everyone feels crowded, no one can find a job and everyone wants to search for happiness in other countries.[77]

At the end of the 19th century an illegal infrastructure emerged that offered Jews from the Pale a cheaper option of moving to America. There was an extensive network of representatives of foreign steamship agencies in Belarus. They provided transportation services for immigrants to the United States. The agents came to town, campaigned and offered their assistance in crossing the border. The fee was 45 rubles. The agency gave a receipt and, lacking a passport, illegally transferred them across the border. Then the migrant on his own went to Hamburg, where he was to appear at the steamship office, show the receipt to get the ticket and board the ship. There were cases when agents deceived customers and took their money after they found themselves in Prussia.[78] Many residents of the border districts were engaged in the transfer of illegal migrants across the border.[79]

Leaving for the United States, immigrants sold all their property to pay the agent 25-30 rubles for transfer across the border and 120 rubles for the journey. Arriving in New York, they ended up penniless on the street, and not knowing the language. Occasionally it happened that they lost all the remaining money: the agents promised that they found jobs for them, took fees for their mediation, brought the immigrants to a remote station and disappeared forever. Not surprisingly, every day 200 to 300 people contacted the Russian consulate asking for help to return.[80]

The historical homeland held a high place in the Jewish system of values. Not surprisingly, during the 19th century Jewish emigration to Palestine was continuous. A widely known example from the end of the 18th century is the emigration of

a Hasidic rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk.[81] A monograph by Leonid Smilovitsky creates a social portrait of those who opted for *aliyah* 100-150 years ago. The author writes that three families (12 persons) came to Palestine from the town of Turov (Mozyr district). Parents were middle aged (around 45 years old). They had the typical "Jewish" occupations: carpenter, tailor, bookbinder. The main reason for the trip was religion: they all belonged to Hasidic Judaism.[82]

The sources create an image of the Jew as a person specially conditioned: "a mobile person," whose way of life was linked with a systematic moving about. In a stable agricultural civilization, Jews were the moving element, and in some of its areas (such as the crafts) they were actually the motor. Their wandering state with "get-up-and-go" features can be considered as a way of adapting to the existing conditions of a society with large traces of stratification. Economic and political discrimination did not allow for Jews to "be like everyone else" and to conduct a stable way of life. Thanks to their mobility, Jews found their special place in Belarusian economy. They chose to connect the various branches of economy and the varied geographical locations. They also managed to bring their services closer to those who needed them.

Wandering *maggids* who met each succeeding Sabbath in a new community; artisans who moved from village to village; literacy teachers (the memoirs mention that they taught the official Russian language for a few months in one place, and then went to another); yeshiva *bocherim*, who after finishing the term could move from one famous for Talmudic studies to another; the clerks of the top guild merchants who toured the Pale of Settlement, conducting the employer's business; factors in search of a *gesheft* (deal) for the host; buyers of agricultural products traveling around the rural areas; coachmen; *shadchans* or itinerant matchmakers, they were all in constant motion, simultaneously creating a communications network within the Pale of Settlement. This activity brought together hundreds of separate communities, which was important after the loss of the inter-communal management at the end of the 18th century. It made the Jewish world united, performing adaptation and regulatory functions for the Jewish community.

Travel gave birth to new types of economic activities: "Jewish mail," a quick and cheap way to send letters by engaging the travelers; domestic hotels, the apartments of most Jews became such during the large fairs (for example, in Nesvizh or Zelva); synagogue was a real "hostel" for wandering students. Hospitality emerged as an imperative of the Jewish ethic in response to "the mobile state" of the people.

The wandering state contributed to changes in the depths of the Jewish culture. Mobility as a quality of the Jewish world, gave a chance to change their lives for those who did not wish to live by the established rules. "Wandering professions" left a person alone with oneself or with the world of another non-Jewish culture. In this situation, the person dropped out from the sphere of social control: there were neither rabbis nor *kahal*, nor even strict parents on the road. Travelers brought innovations that ranged from fashions to social ideas, into the Jewish world.

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A Belarusian who did not fail his humanity

Zina Gimpelevich

As Timothy Snyder (2010: 345) argues, "if the Stalinist notion of the war was to prevail, the fact that the Jews were its main victims had to be forgotten." The outcomes of these policies are shown in a book by Georgii Musevič (1931-2014), which has the long and eloquent title: *Narod, kotoryi zhil sredi nas. Mnogostradalnomu evreiskomu narodu posviashchaetsia* (People who used to live among us. Dedicated to Jewish people who endured so much suffering). Musevič demonstrates the destruction of traditional Belarusian Jewish livelihoods by the tyrannical systems of Stalin and Hitler, depicts the ways local authorities prohibited memory of the Holocaust, and articulates a positive societal relationship in the common past of Christians and Belarusian Jews in the western part of today's Brest region of Belarus. Musevič explains that the foundations for negligence and oblivioness that have characterized Belarusian and Jewish shared history were imposed and promoted by the Soviet rule, particularly after 1945. The author's legacy, which shows no "neutrality in times of moral crisis," is particularly important for the country, whose honorable past is constantly attacked by its own leadership.

The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.
Dante Alighieri

In a slightly more covert way than Hitler, Stalin also celebrated his victory over Soviet Jewry; this was particularly obvious during the first peak of the Cold War. His triumph was manifested in many ways. One of the most powerful was to create an emotional, intellectual, and cultural amnesia about the Jewish victims of WWII; this ruling sentiment was turned into an unwritten law in the USSR. In the words of Timothy Snyder:

> If the Stalinist notion of the war was to prevail, the fact that the Jews were its main victims had to be forgotten. Also to be forgotten was that the Soviet Union had been allied to Nazi Germany when the war began in 1939, and that the Soviet Union was unprepared for the German attack in 1941.[1]

The results of these policies are explored in a book by Georgii Musevič, which has the long and self-explanatory title: *Narod, kotoryi zhil sredi nas. Mnogostradalnomu evreiskomu narodu posviashchaetsia* (People who used to live among us. Dedicated to Jewish people who endured so much suffering).[2]

Musevič vividly limns a small Belarusian territory and shows how traditional Jewish livelihoods were destroyed by the tyrannical systems of Stalin and Hitler. The author plainly describes in what way local rulers prohibited memory of the Holocaust. Musevič articulates a positive societal relationship in the common past of Christians and Belarusian Jews in two Belarusian towns, Kamianiec-Litoŭski and Vysoka-Litoŭsk, as well as a few Jewish agricultural colonies and settlements of the Brest region.[3] Consequently, through the lens of Musevič's work the reader is able to consider the genuine history of Belarusian Jews in these Belarusian locations. Ultimately, his work enhances the historiography of cultural relations and adds to our knowledge of Belarusian Jewish communities.

Context: framing origins

A few survivors of the Holocaust from these territories, who moved to Australia, Canada, Israel, the United States, Canada, and other places, contributed to a book *Sefer Yizkor: Kameints de-Lita (A Memorial Book of Kamenets Litovsk, Zastavye, and the Colonies)*, which was first written in Hebrew and Yiddish but almost immediately translated into English.[4]

Whilst the Yizkor collection is a tribute to a bygone Jewish life, and is written predominantly for Jews and their historical memory, the excerpts below illustrate that Musevič's contribution also provides the most valuable information for Belarusian Christians and Muslims, who over the generations had been deprived of the knowledge of their common past with Jews. Furthermore, prior to the story of Belarusian Jews, the writer offers a concise history of Palestine, and the loss of Hebrew's native lands to the Romans during the first century CE:

> After losing their Promised Land and their state, the Hebrew endured misfortunes, exiles and persecutions for many centuries. However, two thousand years later they managed to return to their primordial historic motherland and to establish their newly created independent state – Israel. Verily, these people endured many sufferings. At the same time, it is impossible to refuse them their huge intellectual potency. And they successfully

> used it for the good of their people. There are many wholehearted individuals among them, if I may say so, of a truly passionate kind. However, their passion was never directed at war or conquests but at peaceful purposes. The Hebrew religion is one of the most ancient. It originated during the first century BCE and gave birth to two mighty branches of the world religions: Christianity (first century CE) and Islam (seventh century CE).[5]

The second introduction to Musevič's work is also historical. It presents the author's rendering of Hebrew life in Palestine before they were exiled and dispersed by the Romans; later, the author follows and describes Hebrew migration and settlement for over the past two thousand years. He examines what shaped the Jewish people's national character and created typical occupations, formed customs and community, worldview, education, and more:

> Circumstances were such that Jews had to learn international trade and create commercial centers, protecting it all via diplomatic routes and military forces of the states where they were living at the time, covering territories from the Pyrenees to China. Jews, as history shows, were often in symbiosis with those in power. The rulers needed money and Jews were looking after trade opportunities, banking / credit systems, and development of craftsmanship / trade. Thus, their wellbeing depended entirely on good relationships with heads of states. This happened in Persia, Khazar's Empire, Spain, France, Germany, and other countries.[6]

In the course of this overview, Musevič notes all kinds of suffering and persecution that Jews have endured. He explains to the reader what brought them to the Slavic lands, in particular to the GDL and the Kingdom of Poland.

He also defies the common opinion that Jews were living in closed communities and did not take part in Slavic affairs by giving many examples to the contrary. One of them is a life of Colonel Berka Ioselevič who formed a Jewish regiment, which became one of the bravest military units during the Tadeusz Kościuszko/Tadevuš Kasciuška uprising against the Russian Empire.[7]

About the author: biography, regional links, and motivation

Georgii Musevič was born in Dmitrowicze (Belarusian: Dzmitravičy), near Kamieniec Litewski. All his life he was closely connected to that town and its area, which is currently a part of the Belarusian Brest region.

Kamianiec-Litoŭski had many different rulers since it was founded by the Volhynian Prince of Kievan descent, Vladimir, in 1276. Ever since, many princes of Kievan Ruś, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Moscow principality, and Commonwealth of Both Nations (*Rzeczpospolita/Reč Paspalitaja*) have claimed this place at different times. A majority of population was Belarusian and Jews. After the partitions, a victorious Russian empire reigned there, and, later, in accordance with the Riga treaty of 1921, Kamieniec Litewski became a part of Poland. Before 1921, Belarusians, Polish, and Ukrainians of many faiths, as well as other Slavic and non-Slavic people – Latvians, Lithuanians, Tatars, and Jews – were living there in peace. In 1939 the area was given back to Soviet Belarus.

Actually, not by an accident Kamianec-Litoŭski got his second name, "Litoŭski." At the time of Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Polish commonwealth, known as *Reč Paspalitaja*, Kamianiec-Litoŭski had the royal palace, and it was a meeting place of royals, nobles, and their subjects.

Kamianiec is located near Brest, which made the town of Kamianiec-Litoŭski a natural crossroad between the north and the south, the west and the east of the GDL. This town was located in the center of both the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (*Litva*) and Reč Paspalitaja, and, naturally, it became a resting place for many merchants and travelers on the main road that led from Viĺnia to Lwów.

During the rule of the Prince Vladimir in the 13th century, the town's landmark became dominant with the main defense tower, called *Bielaja vieža* (Belarusian for: The White Tower). The tower also gave the name to *Bielaviežskaja pušča* (Belarusian for: The White Tower's thicket), to a huge, dense forest, where ancient bisons (Belarusian: *zubry*) have been at home for millennia.

While Georgii Musevič admired and treasured his home area, he also balanced his rich professional life with an intense and productive preoccupation with the history and genealogy of his own family, and the history of his native land. His family records start with year 1660. His grandfather, Petr Elenetskii, was a Russian Orthodox priest. Father Elenetskii was also an exceptionally well-educated person and bibliophile, whose library comprised close to five hundred tomes and collections of three Russian major journals in the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th century.

The library's tomes were of diverse genres, from history books to belles-letters. Many were rare, in particular those related to the Old Church Slavonic language. All of this was preserved with the intention of passing the library down to the

grandchild, Georgii Musevič. However, in 1944 the family had to leave their home for a few days due to the closeness of the military front. When they returned, there were only a few books left from their grand library.

Through books, mostly historical in nature, and his own meticulous commitment to self-education, Georgii Musevič, fluent in Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Polish, became a true expert in local lore. His formal schooling, however, was in physical education and culture. He graduated from the five-year university program with a qualification as a high school physical education instructor.

After graduation Musevič worked in this capacity for five years, and his students showed excellent results in various sports. As a result of this success, he was appointed director of a children's sport school, called "Pušča." Musevič held this position for thirty years until his retirement.

His students often took part in sport competitions in the larger cities of the former USSR. Then, in his spare moment, he would run to an antique or a second-hand book store, hunting for rare books in Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Polish. His first choice was history books; however, any rare book would make his collector's heart rejoice.

In his early eighties, Musevič began to part with his treasures by donating them to libraries and Belarusian cultural centers and institutions. The richest part of his collection, eight hundred books, went to Hajnówka, Białystok region (currently Poland); it was delivered by Natalia Herasimiuk, Hajnówka's librarian for the Center of Belarusian culture.

This donation of Georgii Musevič is particularly symbolic. Belarus had been linguistically and to some extent culturally colonized by Polish and Russian rulers in the seventeenth and the 18th century. However, only the Soviet "tsars" managed the almost complete russification of Belarusian lands. And while Poland was none too benevolent toward Belarusian culture, there is still more recognition of a Belarusian presence in a town like Hajnówka compared to similar places in today's Belarus. Indeed, this gift is a true tribute to the people who are trying to preserve their Belarusian roots.

Young Georgii was accustomed to hearing Yiddish in his favorite city until all the Jewish inhabitants vanished from his world in 1942. This disappearance had profound long-term impact on him and inspired Musevič to concentrate on writing about his former neighbors, and to dedicate his work to his country's lost population. Here is what the author has written in the first foreword to his 105-page treatise that took him eight years to complete (2001-2009):

> I am standing at the threshold of eternity, therefore I cannot, I have no right to, take along with me everything that I know, found in documents, what I heard from people who couldn't stay indifferent, and what I learnt from their memories.[8]

Further on, the author lists thirty-four of his contributors who supplied him with information in many interviews, and presented him with documentation. He expresses his gratitude for their remarkable efforts to tell the truth. It should be underlined, once again, that due to the absence of Jews, most of his contributors were local Belarusians of Christian origin.

Historical framework

The author begins from the year 1500, which, according to him, marks the birth of active Jewish life in Kamianiec-Litoŭski. He tells the reader that, although, some sources mention Jews living in the city as far back as 1465, there is no confirmation of their existence until Šlioma Ichelevič, a Jewish merchant from Brest, purchased a house.[9] It is significant, that there is not much historical fact on Jewish history about Kamianiec. Every contribution of local Jewish memories to the website, including an excellent memoir by Leybl Goldberg (Sarid), *A Short History of Kamenentz Litovsk*, laments the fact that due to the Holocaust, there are no Jewish records about the place; therefore they all have to use Lithuanian chronicles and metrics (written in Old Belarusian).[10] Using these sources, he states at the beginning of his article that "[i]n 1878 there were 6,885 inhabitants in Kamenetz and the adjoining villages; 5,900 (90%) of them were Jews."

Though Goldberg and Musevič are using the same sources, their involvement comes from different directions. Goldberg is searching for his roots while Musevič, who was never uprooted from his motherland, does more than just give a hand to people who, like Goldberg, are seeking documented facts about their ancestors. In his book Musevič created a new depository of Jewish life in historic Belarus, one that was practically wiped out by the middle of the 20th century. Furthermore, as we mentioned earlier, the author kindles the flame on the way to truth about the fate of Jews in the area during the Holocaust. His accomplishments are particularly stimulating and important because even

the most authoritative sources have missed the Jewish destruction in the region of Kamianiec-Litoŭski during WWII.[11] *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, for example, possesses data only about Brest.[12] Because of the dated interviews and named contributors, Musevič's work stands out as a verified historic chronicle. However, by western standards, which are significantly stricter than Soviet and post-Soviet ones, *People who lived among us* might not be accepted as a full-fledged academic work by some scholars.[13]

Nevertheless – and what is of the paramount importance – his book includes the most valuable tables, which supply impeccable and unique academic data. These tables are mainly dated 1939, and are accompanied by the comprehensive comments of the author. The first table is entitled: "References to Jewish habitations in 1939.[14] It shows that 92.1% of Kamianiec-Litoŭski's inhabitants were Jews, and lists twenty-three names of nearby places where Jews lived: altogether they were 6,921 in that district, 16% of the populace. The numbers varied from two thousand Jews in the neighboring town, Vysoka-Litoŭsk, to one person in the village of Liašanka. The second table is titled "Professions of Kamianiec-Litoŭski's residents."[15] Here Musevič presents a comparative study, which shows that out of forty-eight professional occupations, Belarusian Christians were not engaged in nineteen. These purely Jewish professions included house painters, glaziers, watchmakers, harness and gear makers, leather dressers, butchers, tailors, hat-makers, bakers, and others. The most common profession, also exclusively Jewish, was that of a carter (*balagola*). Shopkeepers, teachers, and laborers were also popular occupations. Jews were involved in various types of trade due to the many farmers' markets in town. Trading stopped in Kamianiec-Litoŭski only for one day a week, Saturday, and during the Jewish High Holidays.

> Jewish trade had its own, time-honored special methods, characteristics, and approaches. First, there was narrow specialization in produce and goods. Second, there was stiff competition, the result of which was always a winning situation for the customer in terms of variety, quality, and price. Third, Jewish tradesmen could sell on credit if a customer did not have money. Fourth, Jews did not mind intermediary work. For example, a second-hand dealer could buy a chicken from a peasant and sell it for more to richer Jews. The Jewish vendor was not idly waiting for a customer to visit his little shop. He insistently called out, almost drugging a potential customer in, and did not let him leave without a purchase. They particularly valued returned customers. Jews did not mind serving others. Thus, a landowner, Mankovski, on his way to the Catholic Church on Sundays or Christian High Holidays, would stop by the shop of Mojše Vapniarski and tell him what he wanted. On his way home, Mankovskii picked up his orders, and Vapniarski made a small profit.[16]

There was Christian dominance in agriculture and the municipal bureaucracy. Musevič's table and comments demonstrate that most Jews were laborers and tradesmen, impoverished before WWII and therefore socio-economically closer to the peasantry than to the ruling class. Though a minority in Kamianiec-Litoŭski's agriculture landscape, there were large numbers of Jewish peasants in agricultural colonies and settlements around the town: in Voŭčyn, Abramava, Sarava, and others.[17]

The next table, "Jewish and Christian homes in Kamianiec-Litoŭski," is also extremely telling in a number of aspects, including living conditions in the town (Musevič 95-6). There were 541 houses in forty streets in Kamianiec-Litoŭski. 163 homes were owned by Christians (out of 335 individuals), and 378 homes belonged to Jews (out of 3,909 individuals). This implies that there were approximately eight Jewish dwellers per house, while there were only two people in Christian houses on average. There is no data how many of the well-to-do inhabitants from both faiths rented out their properties to those impoverished apprentices and others who couldn't afford their own homes. Nevertheless, these numbers that Musevič provided convincingly illustrate Jewish poverty in his hometown before WWII. When the Soviets took over the town, many streets were renamed. Musevič's next table is, "Names of streets in Kamianiec-Litoŭski".[18] His comment is that, out of forty, sixteen streets and three squares disappeared after WWII, and the rest of the streets were renamed.

Breadth of themes

The book is divided into sixty-seven parts, each with a self-explanatory title. Every part has a concise exposition of various topics and genres: history, socio-economics, culture, religion, and other aspects of everyday living. For example, the third chapter is called "Occupations of Jews in Kamianiec." Each subject in every chapter is based on verifiable facts, well-developed, and well-written. Every topic reads like a literary short story, and could have been considered as such if they were not based on factual events and documents, which connects the narration to a documentary.

Hereafter we will give abstracts of the book's most characteristic mini-chapters. Chapter five, for example, entitled "Industry and craftsmanship," names and describes all the industries and factories of the area that involved Jews as owners, lessees, and laborers.

There were three hundred tradesmen in Kamianiec-Litoŭski alone: forty-eight of them were shoemakers and thirteen were tailors. A merchant of the second guild[19], Lejba Vargaftik, opened a textile factory in Vysoka-Litoŭsk in the 19th century. This enterprise employed seventy-seven people, and seventy-two of them were Jews. Before WWII a good number of businesses belonged to local Jews. Among those were hydro-electric station, seven mills, three black smithy shops, a brick plant, and a leather factory. Many Jews, as Musevič's table shows, were keepers of small corner stores or experienced tradesmen.

The next chapter is entitled "Agricultural colonies," and narrates the unique history of Jewish involvement in local farming. Though the author tells us that the majority of Jews were not involved in working the land due to the tsarist governmental restrictions, there were three Jewish agricultural settlements, Lotava, Sarava, and Abramava. Musevič describes in detail Jewish life in these settlements, giving historic references related to settlements as far back as 1700. For example, in 1700 there were twenty-four families in Sarava, who initially received about sixty-two acres each from the Russian government. At the beginning of this venture, the land was enough to feed each of the families. However, while families grew, the land did not, and many colonists were forced to sell or to rent their land and to move to the cities. Some would engage in seasonal labor in Europe, the US, and Canada. Others left their country for Palestine, as did the second-generation colonist Izrael Ahkienazi, who, in addition to his own work, was teaching farming to newcomers from Europe.

Spiritual life and education

Musevič underlines the role of spiritual education for Jewish children that colonists, who did not pay taxes to Jewish communities in towns, had to take care by themselves:

> The main element of the colonists' living, their spiritual life, was religion and the education of their children. That is why the first colonists, as soon as they constructed their huts and agricultural buildings, had erected a *Beit Midrash*, which combined the functions of a synagogue and a religious school.[20]

The author describes in detail the exterior and interior of a typical *Beit Midrash*, its modesty (straw roof) and the festive, blue-colored ceiling, decorated with stars and signs of the zodiac; prayers took place three times a day, and colonists took turns to perform them. Even more attention is given to the particulars of the children's education in Musevič's book. The reader learns not only about the thirteen-hour school day, which lasted from 7am-to-8pm, but also the names of the four Rabbis who taught there. He also writes that one of them, Rabbi Lejzer Velvel, was also a religious judge and a charity activist, who collected farm produce for poor Jews. Despite the fact that colonists were eligible for free education in Russian and, later, Polish elementary schools, they preferred their own private schools. Colonists who did not have money to pay the school fee would borrow money on the future harvest. Colonies existed until 1941, and according to the documents and many oral witnesses that the author collected and presented, Christians and Jewish farmers lived in mutual respect. In Sarava, for example, Jews lived together with Belarusian Ukrainians: children played together, Christians employed medical and juridical service from Jews, and, until the arrival of the German occupiers, there were no trouble between locals of various ethnicities and faiths. By the end of this extended chapter, the Musevič laments the irreparability of Jewish losses in towns and colonies, and that loss of decency between ethnicities that historic Belarus used to enjoy.

The seventh mini-chapter, "Transport is a window to the world," tells the history of transportation in Kamianiec-Litoŭski and Vysoka-Litoŭsk. The first truck and bus appeared only in the 1930s; before, inhabitants used the services of cart-drivers, *balaholas* or *balagolas*, as everyone called them, using the Yiddish word. With the appearance of a bus station, the town received a central meeting place for all the inhabitants and, simultaneously, a parting place for those who were leaving in search of a better life in the United States, Australia, Canada, Cuba, Palestine, and other places. "Labor conditions" is one of the shortest chapters of the book. It tells the reader that though there were many highly qualified blue-collar workers in town, they could hardly make ends meet, and only a third of them could afford even a poor private dwelling. The first trade union was formed by tailors and seamstresses; these professions were the only ones that prevailed in a strike, resulting in an eight-hour working day.

Chapters nine, ten, and eleven describe numbers of the following institutions: "Enterprises (86)," "Shops" (113), "Small retail (73)," "Restaurants" (2) and "Tea-houses" (13). Every small business had name that described its specialization; there were, for example: grocery shops (48), bookstores (1), pharmaceutical storehouses (2), and ice-cream shops (2). Chapter twelve, "Public affairs," starts with a substantial list of public and charitable organizations that ranged from trusteeship for elders and orphans to an emigration society, and lists a number of culture-and-education related charities.

There were also a number of political parties, such as Zionists, Jewish People, Jewish Labor (communist), Independent Jewish, Poalei Zion (a Social-Democratic Labour Party), the Bund, Gordonia, Beitar (members of the latter also formed a volunteer team of firefighters) and fifty-four members of a wind orchestra.[21]

Jewish political involvement in Polish government elections in Kamianiec-Litoŭski and Vysoka-Litoŭsk is truly impressive. In Kamianiec-Litoŭski, 80% of eligible inhabitants took part in the election of 1927, and 87.5% showed up for elections in Vysoka-Litoŭsk. Twelve seats were available, and eleven were elected from different Jewish parties; only one seat was won by a member of the Christian Independent Party.

Chapters thirteen to sixteen are dedicated to Jewish education, and each of them lists all the schools, including the private ones, attended by children of different ages; these chapters describe gender and studying conditions in Jewish colonies, villages, and towns of Kamianiec-Litoŭski and Vysoka-Litoŭsk.

Yeshiva

"Kamianiec-Litoŭski's Yeshiva" is one of the most detailed chapters in the book. The author writes of this institution with pride, and relates its history, which goes back to 1897. It was founded in Kovna (presently Kaunas), and in 1926 was moved from Wilno to Kamieniec Litewski.

Musevič equates this religious institution to a university since its students' ages ranged from sixteen to twenty-five years old. Each had to pass difficult entrance exams, and attend ten-hour daily classes for up to ten years, after which they received the qualification of a Rabbi.[22] The historian draws a clear picture of the place, names leading teachers of the Yeshiva, tells their life stories and notes their many academic, civil, and charitable achievements; the author discusses the quality of students, their origins, and much more.

Indeed, judging by geographical origins of the students – Poland, USA, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Latvia, England, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and other countries – Kamianiec-Litoŭski's Yeshiva, which had 413 students in 1939, was a popular place and played an important role in Jewish education at the time. This chapter ends on a major note, stating that a number of Yeshiva students and teachers succeeded in emigration to the USA (New York) and Israel, where they continued the school's tradition by naming the newly established schools after their favorite Belarusian town.

In *Sefer Yizkor le-Kehilot Kameints de-Lita*, there is a chapter by Charles Raddock, "The Kamenetzer Yeshivah of America."[23] This chapter describes the Yeshiva's thorny road to New York and, later, Israel. Raddock tells a fascinating story of upheavals that Yeshiva had to undertake in order to survive, and names each of its relocations. According to him, the Yeshiva was founded in 1905 in Kremenchug, re-established itself in Minsk, and then returned to Kremenchug in order to avoid the horrors of WWI. The Yeshiva's next move was Kovna, then Wilno after which, as we know, Kamianiec-Litoŭski (Polish: Kamieniec Litewski) became its last home on Slavic lands; here the school established its prestige in Jewish scholarship.

Though the Yeshiva's educators and students alike hoped that this Belarusian town was their last destination, their hopes were crushed by the outbreak of WWII. They left their beloved town, underwent great difficulties, and buried many students and their highly cherished leader, Rabbi B. B. Leibovitz (Rav Baruck Baer) on their way via the Far East and Mongolia to the US and Israel. Rabbi B. B. Leibovitz was considered to be the Talmudic genius of the 20th century, and the loss was irreparable. Raddock also explains what distinguishes Kamianiec's graduates from other schools:

> Kamenetz, it seems, does not produce mere Rabbis or other ecclesiastical functionaries. Its emphasis is on research and scholarship, as in a sense, Princeton's University Institute for Advanced Study under the directorship of Prof. Robert Oppenheimer concentrates on scientific research for the enhancement of science.[24]

The author stresses the higher status of this Yeshiva's students due to their exceptional teachers and the rigorous pursuit of advanced knowledge that superseded any other Jewish

schools. This school also offered unlimited years of study dedicated to Judaism:

> What sets apart Kamenetzer Yeshivah from other yeshivoth is that its disciples are competent to carry on in the absence of their late celebrated dean, hewing to the course laid down during the four creative decades of his rule. The first principle of his teaching was this, that the study of Talmud, Halachah and related subjects must be pursued for its own sake, without regard for material gain or reward.[25]

To prove his point, Raddock brings up a unique publication:

> The anthology just published by Kamenetzer Kotel [university] entitled *Degel Naphtali*[26] and containing original monographs of the most profound rabbinic problems, attests to the scholarship of that learned fraternity.[27]

With time, however, the "Kamenetzer Kotel" of New York lost its importance in the USA, and transferred its credentials to its sister institution in Israel. According to my private correspondence with an American researcher, Henry Neugrass, the US branch has been closed, but the one in Israel continues to thrive. However, it is a closed orthodox institution, that could be compared to strict monasticism, which preserves its traditions by maintaining an absence of communication with the outside world, including that of secular Jews.

Communal life and its history

In the next chapters, "Kahal life,"[28] "Historic references," "Kahal life in Kamianiec-Litoŭski," and "Kahal Council in Vysoka-Litoŭsk in 1936," Musevič presents tables and examines Jewish life from its early inception to Soviet times in Belarus. Musevič frequently addresses the uneasy relationship of Jews with some princes, kings and other rulers of the GDL and *Reč Paspalitaja*, as well as harsh competition with Christian middle classes, which, he notes, is reflected in many Lithuanian (Old Belarusian) chronicles and decrees. These documents confirm his sentiment that life was not so easy for the GDL's Jews:

> sometimes privileges were given easily (for a considerable fee, that's why rulers called Jews 'chickens with golden eggs'), but often, prohibitions, negligence, and limitations were in place. That was a way of life.[29]

By the end of the 19th century, Kamianiec-Litoŭski had changed ownership about five times; in 1887 it was sold to a Jewish merchant from Bialystok, Abram Niemcovič. During WWI the town was first captured by Austrians and then occupied by German troops, which, in turn, gave in first to the Polish army (1918), and, later, to the Red army (1920). Chapter twenty-three offers an extremely valuable table of comparative historical numbers for four minorities of the place: Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and Jews. It starts with 1764, and ends in the year 1939.

The only ambiguous feature of this table is the complete absence of Belarusians (*Lićviny*) in their home city, Kamianiec-Litoŭski. Our guess is that Musevič lumped Roman Catholic and Uniate [Eastern Catholic Church] Belarusians and Ukrainians with Poles and Orthodox Belarusians and Ukrainians with Russians.

This is a common error for persons of lesser education, but, in Musevič's case it reads like an attempt to simplify things in order to make them more understandable. Nevertheless, his table gives a clear picture about a significant prevalence of Jewish population in both towns and colonies from 1897 to 1941.

Jewish culture, religion, places of worship, and cemeteries

Chapters twenty-four throughout twenty-eight are dedicated to religion. They depict synagogues, tell stories about a local cantor, describe Jewish burial places, and offer other cultural distinctions. These chapters elucidate the central role of religion in the history of Belarusian Jews, as reflected in the large number of synagogues and prayer houses.

Musevič tells the reader about stylistic and architectural simplicity, supported by strong structures, typical of synagogues in that area. Even the smallest synagogues and prayer houses, made of wood and roofed with straw, were notable landmarks in villages and towns. Choral, grand, or great synagogues, though modest on the exterior, were built with thick stone and had very impressive interiors, decorated with beautiful religious artifacts often made out of the pure silver. Musevič describes synagogues and prayer houses with such architectural and engineering detail that even people without experience of these structures can imagine them.

Most of these synagogues were destroyed either by Germans or Soviets, but some are still standing, despite the fact that they were "renovated" and used as schools, warehouses, small factories, and repair shops. Musevič often asks the painful rhetorical questions, as such:

> Why are a majority of former synagogues not included in a Soviet edition of *Historical monuments and architecture of Belarus*; why did they

not find a rightful place there? What is it? Is it just an accident?[30]

The author offers a detailed description of synagogues and prayer houses in most towns, villages, and settlements in the area (unless no one remembers their exact locations, as in Viarchovičy and Lotava). When former religious and prayer houses are still utilized, Musevič provides addresses and indicates their present-day use.

Chapter twenty-six is mainly about a local Cantor Jaffe, but it also concludes the history of synagogues and prayer houses in Kamianiec-Litoŭski, Vysoka-Litoŭsk, the Jewish colonies, and surrounding areas. Its visual graphic reminds one of a black-and-white movie:

> On the eve of Yom Kippur [Judgment Day], the synagogue was overcrowded and brightly illuminated by hanging candelabras. A forest of burning candles cast shadows. Along the Eastern Wall old men from the town, dressed in white, were praying, slowly bowing like forest trees. Suddenly silence fell, and everyone held their breath, waiting for Kol Nidre [All Vows] to start.[31]

Then the author lists many talents of Cantor Jaffe, whose high art made even those who barely understood Hebrew feel unity with God and other members of the community. And though the story makes much of the traditional phrase "Next Year in Jerusalem," a sense of this forever lost part of Belarusian culture is underlined by Musevič, who laments the needless lost lives of his Belarusian Jewish compatriots:

> When one reminiscence about those bygone times, one understands how many talents perished in our town, and how much they could had achieved if they lived somewhere else and under different conditions.[32]

The next chapter, "Jewish graveyards," narrates a detailed and solemn description of Jewish graveyards, traditional gravestones, and their lost and sometimes found locations. It is followed by a table of names of those Rabbis and cantors who served the community. Among them, Musevič was able to discover the names of twenty-eight individuals; he also notes that due to difficulties with collecting materials, he could not establish the names of many other Rabbis and cantors who served the communities.

Chapters thirty through thirty-five are entirely about Jewish culture of Kamianiec-Litoŭski. The author underlines the fact that, though the political and economic significance of the area decreased considerably after Russia grabbed the town from the *Reč Paspalitaja* in 1795, Jewish cultural life continued to be strong. It was supported by libraries, resident authors, scholars, a local wind orchestra and individual musicians, as well as some theater groups. Visiting religious and cultural stars loved to come to a grateful audience of the town. This excursion into the past of Jewish cultural life is enhanced by Yekheskl Kotik's memories about his early years in the town of his birth and other Belarusian and Russian cities where he lived in later years.[33] At par with other memoirists born in Belarus proper, Kotik's reminiscences about non-Belarusian parts of the Russian empire carry a different emotional quality. Thus, they are warm and full of humor when he writes of his home town and country, contrasting greatly with the author's loneliness and his experiences of coldness in Russia proper. Kotik's sentiments sound exactly like that of his countryman, Falk Zolf, who also wrote about early twentieth-century Belarusian Jewish life.[34]

The dreadful 20th century

Musevič's rendering of Kotik's memoirs bridges the relatively peaceful 19th century with the transitional and troubled period at the beginning of the 20th century in his thirty-eighth chapter, "The dreadful 20th century." This chapter carefully lists the hardships that locals endured during that century but lingers in detail on WWI (the forceful deportations to Russia proper, exile, food deprivation, home demolition, and other privations). Yet, these hardships were just a prelude compare to the catastrophes of WWII. Musevič testifies that the Germans, who stayed in town for only sixteen days after they attacked Poland in 1939, at first behaved in a civil way. A week later, German troops were replaced by Red Army divisions. As described in the chapter "Arrival of the Red Army," these newcomers turned everything upside-down in town. The new authorities immediately nationalized Jewish properties; synagogues and the Yeshiva were closed. All religious festivities were banned; this included traditional Saturdays: now Jews were obliged to work on their holy day. Even the names of their towns were russified by the new occupants. Kamianiec-Litoŭski became Kamenets and Vysoka-Litoŭsk – Vysokoe.

The later narration turns to the Holocaust, and describes events of this catastrophe in Kamianiec-Litoŭski and other nearby geographic areas. Chapters forty-four through fifty-four are dedicated to Dora Halperina, one of the three Holocaust survivors in Kamianiec. Although the Soviets changed traditional Jewish and Christian life overnight, their actions were not as murderous as the Germans who returned twenty-one

months later. The Germans reached Kamianiec-Litoŭski on 22 June 1941, when Hitler declared war on the USSR:

> German motorbikes arrived in town at ten o'clock in the morning. They were not those civilly behaving German soldiers that locals saw in 1939. These were murderers.[35]

Indeed, killing of Jews started on the very first day of the Germans' arrival. They were witnessed by local Christians whose interviews were collected right after the war; currently the interviews are kept in Belarusian archives. Many years later Musevič has conducted interviews himself (the latest in the 2000s); they describe the murder of individual Jews and their families, as well as mass killings in the ghettos. All of this is told in chapters thirty-nine through forty-three: "The War," "First shootings of Jews," "Deportation to Pružany and the return to Kamianiec," "The ghetto in Kamianiec," and "The continuation of shooting." In addition to archival materials and interviews, Musevič uses academic sources about the Holocaust in Belarus.

Chapter forty-four is completely dedicated to Dora Halperina; the next ten mini-chapters are sequels to that one. These mini-chapters are based on memories of the story's heroine. Tragic twists of Halperina's days under German and Soviet rules, where her life was hanging by a thread not only due to the German atrocities: she was treated badly by Soviets who questioned reasons of her survival, and imprisoned Dora. Her story is concluded in chapter fifty-four, "The author's comment," where Musevič reveals the names of people who helped Dora's survival, and tells the reader that after Halperina's final liberation from the Soviet prison, she first flew to Poland and later to Australia, where she died. This story, tragic in its singularity, is followed by two chapters, "Labor deportation of Jewish lads" and "Liquidation of the ghetto." Both chapters finalize the account about the death of Kamianiec's Jews. Musevič proffers the following numbers of dead: 6,921 Jews and over 1,500 Christians; altogether, 17.3% of this district's population. Besides Dora Halperina, he names two more survivors: Leon Goldring from Kamianiec-Litoŭski and Shlema Kantarovič from Vysoka-Litoŭsk. The author noted those inhabitants who had immigrated to Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, England, and other countries before the war. These people fostered the memories of their ancestors and homeland, some of which is found in Sefer Yizkor book, in particular in the chapter about the Kamianiec societies in America. Reports by Velvel Kustin, Sarah Hurvitz, and Meir Mendel Visotzky, for example, cover newcomers' humble beginnings of the first Jewish community from Kamianiec-Litoŭski in the USA:[36]

> A Large-scale Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States began in the 17th century in the eighties. Jews from Kamianiec were among those coming to America's shores. The first newcomers from Kamianiec were poor and quite miserable. They suffered common hardships and were homesick. This and the fact that the Jewish population in the US, was as yet small, made them cling together. When the number of Kamianiec townspeople in the "new country" grew, they acquired a Torah-Scroll and established a society, centered round their own synagogue, Kokhav Ya'acov [Jakob's star]. The society was founded in 1891 in New York City. It became the oldest Kamianiec organization and one of the first Jewish societies of that kind in America. One of the fixed rules stated that meetings must be conducted in Yiddish.[37]

In 1900 the Kamianiec–Litoŭski's Aid Society in America was instituted by non-Orthodox Jews. The society, among other activities, was very helpful to their townspeople after the end of WWI. According to the author, Mendel Visotzky, the membership was ready to repeat their charitable work after WWII:

> Soon after the end of the Second World War, the Kamianiec Society, together with all other Kamianiec's organizations, set up a relief-committee once again, in the hope of helping the war victims of our town. Great were our pain and sorrow when we learned about the enormous proportions of the catastrophe."[38]

Indeed, there was no one left to receive help.

Aftermath and memory

The next chapter, "Thirty years later in Kamianiec," is a careful and loving retelling of the story, written by a former resident of Kamianiec, Dov (Bertschik) Schmidt (Shemida), "My Journey to Kamianiec in 1965."[39] Dov, like many others of his townsmen left Kamianiec in order to earn some money and ended up in the USA. When he got his first job, Dov sent a ticket to his sweetheart, Elia, and, as soon as she arrived on the eve of WWII, they married. Shortly, the young family moved to Israel, and years later, in 1965, Dov, who earned his PhD, was invited to a scholarly fishing conference in Moscow.

Dov had many questions; he decided to go to Poland to meet with his childhood friend, Dora Halperina, who had lived through the Holocaust in their native town. After the meeting took place, he decided to visit Kamianiec. Dov knew

that there would be no traces of his family or their graves, but still he needed this closure. The Soviets allowed him only five hours in town.

When Dov Schmidt arrived in Kamianiec, he did not find the windmills and Jewish cemeteries; the old Catholic Church was also destroyed. Recognition of the place came to him only when he reached the market place, because almost all the old Jewish and Christian homes and other buildings were still there, looking older, but intact:

> I paid a short visit to Yuzek Grigorevsky. Yuzek had saved Dora by hiding her in various places. He did it endangering his own life and the life of his own family. When we met, Yuzek was even more moved than I was. All the time he kept on repeating: "They murdered everybody and I was able to save only one! Not a single one of your family remained!"[40]

Dov Schmidt wrote about reactions of various people whom he met during his stroll with Yuzek and his sons around the town. They varied from fear to anger, from pity to indifference. Here are three illustrations of his encounters:

> I shall never forget the only person who met me with tears during my visit to Kamenetz. While I was walking the town's street with Yuzek's children, an old Christian woman came out of the yard of the house opposite Yuzek's and asked me: "Aren't you the son of Hayim Schmidt, the butcher?" When I said "Yes, that's right," she burst into tears and flung herself at me to kiss me. The woman wailed loudly: "How the wild beasts murdered you! Why was your fate so bitter! Your father and mother and all your family were good, upright people! Why did they murder you! Have any Jews from Kamianiec remained in the world?" So this simple, honest Christian woman lamented and cried together with me.[41]

The second emotional moment happened when he went to visit his parents' home, where Dov had spent the first nineteen years of his life:

> I knocked softly on the door and opened it even before I heard an answer. An old woman came out of the second room, which had been my parents' bedroom. Tears choked me. I felt paralyzed and unable to utter a word. Apparently, the woman understood my feelings and she began whispering, as if she were talking to herself: "Yes, I knew the owners of this house, Hayim and Rachel and their children and grandchildren. They were good people and did only favors to others. The Nazi beasts murdered them! I thought not one of you was left. Oh, my God, is it our fault if the authorities allocated the houses?"[42]

Dov admitted that after this heartbreaking visit he "lost it," and just wandered around the familiar streets for a while. When he pulled himself together, he decided to acquire some information about the Jewish catastrophe from the town's officials:

> I entered the Secretariat and turned to the Soviet official who was sitting at the table. I told him about the purpose of my coming from Israel and about my desire to hear from him something about the fate of the 500 Jewish families, among whom were my parents, sister, uncles and aunts, who perished with other inhabitants of the town. With marked coolness and reserve the official responded: "Citizen! You can see all that there is, and what happened here in the past does not concern us anymore. You are allowed to see, to look around and to receive your own impressions. That is all." This was the funeral of my parents, my sisters, my uncles and aunts, my friends and acquaintances and all the Jews who had lived in Kamenetz, my home-town.[43]

The Soviet bureaucrat's behavior was a typical reflection of the USSR's administrative and political attitude towards the murder of the Jewish population. After Germany's capitulation, the Soviet Union and its satellites did not recognize the murder of Jews as ethnic cleansing, but simply as casualties of WWII. However, not everyone in Belarus shared the opinion of this particular Belarusian bureaucrat; it seems that Musevič purposefully included the next three chapters as an antidote to that Soviet lack of humanity.

Summer flowers, no more

These chapters, "An open letter," "Native homes which are no more," and "Summer flowers for a doctor" – fifty-eight, fifty-nine, and sixty – are short and factual stories, each with an independent and well-elaborated plot. They could be united by the same title, "No more" in terms of the annihilation of Jewish residents. "An open letter" is a letter of protest written by Musevič and addressed to the local authorities.[44] In this letter the author questions their reasons and motivation, procedures, legitimacy, and cultural responsibility in terms of selling the former Grand Synagogue to a farmer. He received a formal reply from the district chief, which stated that this was not Musevič's business. "Native homes which are no more," the second of these three chapters, begins:

> There is no more Kamianiec, which used to be populated mainly by Jews. There are no more Jews with their culture, livelihood, and labor. They were shot or burnt in crematoriums. Kamianiec exists but now it is entirely different.[45]

Despite this surrealistic situation of "no more," the Kamianiec Jews who survived by moving to foreign lands before WWII and their descendants continue to visit the place of their ancestry.

Musevič poses the following three-fold question for which he supplies a heartfelt answer:

> Why are they coming here, what do they need, and what are they looking for? They come in order to see their ancestral town, or the place of their own birth; to walk around old streets and alleys; to find their parents' homes; to go with hat in hand to the graves, the cemeteries, to look at the prayer houses, to reach out to the river, along which previous generations lived, to breathe the air, which their fathers, mothers, close and distant relations once breathed.[46]

However, Musevič says with distress, the only thing they could do is to breathe the air because the rest – the atmosphere, culture, prayer houses, cemeteries, and every other trace of old Jewish lives and deaths – are no more. His greatest regret, however, is that neither Kamianiec-Litoŭski nor Vysoka-Litoŭsk, or places where local Jews were shot during the Holocaust (Raviec, Piasčany, and the Vorachaŭski forest) have a memorial, a monument, or any kind of tribute to the murdered inhabitants of this area. After all, "there are almost no more living witnesses to the Kamianiec tragedy."[47]

The third tale, "A Summer flowers for a doctor," is written in the form of a classic short story.[48] The plot is two-fold, containing a story within a story, and is written by a local teacher, Mikhail Mamus. The opening is a concise history of Jewish professional and labor occupations in Kamianiec-Litoŭsk:

> Jews are magnificent masters of clothing, shoemaking, confectionery, meat products, various kinds of flour, and agricultural machinery. They were superb merchants, wholesale dealers of livestock and raw materials. They even rented land and produced good crops.[49]

The next paragraph is dedicated to a "Jewish doctor," Golberg, who, according to the author, was well-known not only in his native Kamianiec-Litoŭsk but far beyond its borders because: "Golberg was a doctor sent by God."[50] Golberg's treatments combined the latest pharmaceutical medicine with homeopathy, massages, and much more. To confirm his words, Mamus refers the reader to the doctor's former patients, who will assure anyone who is ready to listen that doctors like Golberg are no more.

The complication of the story arises when a peasant family brings a baby to the local hospital, where the staff doctor, Bogutsky, announced that the boy's only chance of survival is Doctor Golberg. Golberg confirms the child's grave situation, and immediately applies a treatment to which the baby responds, raising the parents hopes of bringing the boy back to health. Golberg took the child and his mother into his home. The story concludes a week later with some intimate information and happy ending. The child turns out to be the baby brother of Mikhail Mamus, Ivan Mamus, who, years later, followed in the footsteps of his rescuer: Ivan became a doctor himself, and worked in that capacity for forty-two years. The second climactic moment relates to the tragic murder of doctor Golberg, his wife, their son Hirš, daughter Janečka, son-in-law Liudvih, and many other of their kinfolk. The author states that they were mercilessly killed only because of their Jewish origin. The dénouement of the story offers up the family's tender tribute to the Golbergs and a memorialization and regrets of the Jewish lot during the Holocaust:

> During my brother's visits with his family, we always go to the place where his savior and members of the Golbergs family are buried. Ivan kneels in front of the grave and lays flowers. His wife and two sons bow their heads low before His Majesty, the Doctor.[51]

Conclusions and relevance

This story is followed by five more informative chapters dedicated to geography, socio-politics, and professional Jewish livelihoods in the area. The last chapter, or epilogue of the book is not just a summary, but is also a motto of the author's own position on the question of the local Belarusian Holocaust. This epilogue is a journey into Musevič's personal conscience, and a representation of his own generation as well as that of his forefathers. Here are some excerpts from Musevič's last chapter:

> As soon as the Jews were driven away by the Germans, Kamianiec and Vysokaje felt empty. It was a terrible void. Everyone felt that. Other culture began but that, the old one, will never return to our area and forests near Kamianiec: Murynski, Pruskaŭski, Čamiarski; near Vysokaje: Pieniečka, Barok, and old forgotten cemeteries.[52] One does not want to believe that nowadays few inhabitants of Kamianiec, Vysokaje, and many other small and large localities have ever heard about the ghetto, the barbed wire, about shooting Jews, about their complete destruction, incinerators, crematorium, and the Holocaust that was initiated by fascists. Years were passing by, power was changing hands, but there is still silence around this topic. It is already sixty-six years since those sad days when the Holocaust took place on Kamianiec soil. These heartbreaking events are moving further and further beyond the horizon. The grass is rising higher and higher, and stones, covered by moss, are growing deeper and deeper down into the earth. And

only specters of the dead are wandering about. Let this book help the new generations [of Belarusians – ZG] find out that there were such people, Jews, who lived among us.[53]

Musevič proves in his work that the cause of Belarusian Christian and Jewish separation was enforced by outsiders, and that it lies in historical circumstances, which gravely worsened during the Holocaust and WWII. He also shows that the main reason for indifferences and silences that have characterized Belarusian Christian and Jewish history, has been imposed by the Soviet rule that once again strengthened after 1945. In addition to state politics, the change in Belarusian demography also played a significant role: less than 50% of the local pre-war Belarusian population was living in Belarus in 1944-1946. Slowly but surely the population grew, but with newcomers whose culture did not include the history and affinities of Christian and Jewish Belarusians. Both faiths were suppressed by the victorious Russians and Poles but predominantly by the Soviet system. Needless to say, the present regime does not differ much from previous ones.

Indeed, the Belarusian situation is grave once again in terms of political, economic, and cultural freedom, where the rights of Belarusians to use and respect their own native language are even more diminished than in Soviet times.

Besides the question of native Belarusian culture, there are many more topics that are not popular in Lukashenka's Belarus. One of them is the Belarusian Jewish past. The present-day Belarusian memory about the Holocaust slips into "lapse," an amnesia that has a history in Stalin's policy. Musevič's legacy, which shows no "neutrality in times of moral crisis," is particularly important for the country, whose honor is constantly attacked by its own leadership. In contrast, Musevič's work is straightforward; the unassuming narration portrays courage and dutiful need to pass on his knowledge to the younger generations. Most probably, his feelings stem from the notion well defined by Timothy Snyder: "[t]he dead are remembered but the dead do not remember."[54] Musevič has chosen to remember the murdered Jewish citizens of his country, and to bring this information forward. We hope that the reader will agree that for this deed the author deserves a place among the righteous.

References

[1] Timothy Snyder. *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 345.

[2] Georgii Musevič (1931- 2014) is a Belarusian historian, journalist, writer, and a public figure. *Narod, kotoryi zhil sredi nas. Mnogostradalnomu evreiskomu narodu posviashchaetsia* (People who used to live among us. Dedicated to Jewish people who endured so much) (Brest: Brest Belarus Group, 2009), <http://kamenets.by/downloads/book/people.pdf>.

[3] In addition to the history of the area, Musevič's book brings together unique data about Belarusian Jewish livelihoods before and after the Catastrophe. Indeed, even such authoritative sources as Laqueur, Walter (ed.). *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) and Arad, Yitzak. *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and University of Nebraska, 2009), do not mention the Holocaust in the Belarusian cities of Kamianiec-Litoŭski and Vysoka-Litoŭsk, and, in places where thousands of local Jews were murdered: Raviec, Piasčany, the Vorachaŭski forest, among others.

[4] Eisenstadt, Shmuel and Mordechai Gilbart (eds.). Sefer Yizkor. *Kameints de-Lita: A Memorial Book of Kamenets Litovsk, Zastavye, and Colonies* (Tel-Aviv: Orli, 1970). Project's Coordinator: Jenni Buck. I am sincerely grateful to Ms. Buck for references. See: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kamenets/Kamenets.html>.

[5] Musevič, *op. cit.*, note 2, p. 2.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Kustin, Velvel. 'The Jewish Agricultural Colonies', pp. 56-68, in: Eisenstadt and Gilbart, *op. cit.*, note 4, <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Kamenets/kam046.html#Page56 >.

[11] See: note 3.

[12] Laqueur, *op. cit.*, note 3, p. 83. Out of thirty thousand ghetto inhabitants in Brest, only about two hundred survived. Others were either shot in the town or were deported to other places for annihilation.

[13] Though pages 101-103 give us most sources for Musevič's work, there are no references to these works and pages in the body of the book. Once again, this style is still acceptable for most writings in the post-Soviet lands.

[14] Musevič, *op. cit.*, note 2, p. 93.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[18] *Ibid*., pp. 97-8.

[19] The merchants in Russia were divided in three classes or guilds, where everyone had its own proper privileges; the lowest class paid sixty; the second paid three hundred, and the top paid eight hundred silver rubels per annum. The top guild was the aristocracy of capital and industry. The middle station was occupied by merchants of the second guild, whose commerce had had narrower limits; lowest range, traders of the third guild was represented by petty dealers, who had not had the right of drawing bills of exchange. Nevertheless, the Jews, who thus paid a considerable sum annually to the government, in addition to being taxed as all other merchants, were allowed to trade only in seventeen provinces, where they were permitted to reside; Jews were excluded from the remainder of the fifty-two provinces of the empire. This material is slightly edited and copied from: <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/litin/guild.html>.

[20] Musevič, *op. cit*., note 2, p. 14. *Beit Midrash* is translated as House of learning or House of interpretation.

[21] *Ibid*., p. 21.

[22] The Yeshiva educational system of that time is hard to compare with today's education. In a Canadian University, it would take approximately ten years to earn a PhD, which could compare to an extensive Yeshiva education.

[23] Raddock, Charles. 'The Kamenetzer Yeshivah of America', pp. 136-39, in: Eisenstadt and Gilbart, *op. cit*., note 4.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 137.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Degel Naphtali* is a Festschrift [celebratory writing honoring a respected person – BR] dedicated to Rabbi B. B. Leibovitz of Kamianiec.

[27] Raddock, *op. cit*., note 23, p. 137.

[28] *Kahal* (*qahal*) is a community, gathering, or the local governing body of a former European Jewish community administering religious, legal, and communal affairs.

[29] Musevič, *op. cit*., note 2, pp. 34-5.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 45. *Kol Nidre* is a prayer recited on the eve of the Day of Atonement / Judgment day.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 46.

[33] *Ibid*., pp. 56-60. Yekheskl (Ezekiel) Kotik (1847-1921), is known for his two-volume memoir *Mayne Zikhroynes* (My Memories; 1913-1914). In the first volume of his memoir the author describes his childhood in Kamianiec, while in the second volume he writes of his life in Russia proper.

[34] Zolf, Falk (1898-1961). *On Foreign Soil: Tales of a Wandering Jew*. Translated by Martin Green. (Windsor: Benchmark Publishing, 2001). A second part of *On Foreign Soil*, includes less warm recollections about Belarusian Jewish life in the shtetls under the Soviets.

[35] Musevič, *op. cit*., note 2, p. 62.

[36] See: Eisenstadt and Gilbart, *op. cit*., note 4, pp. 127-145.

[37] Kustin, Velvel. 'The Kokhav Ya'akov Anshey Kamenetz D'lita Society,', pp. 143-48(143), in: Eisenstadt and Gilbart, *op. cit*., note 4.

[38] Meir Mendel Visotzky. "The Establishment of Kamenetz-Litovsk Aid Society in America. Activity Report.," pp. 130-35(131), in: Eisenstadt and Gilbart, op. cit., note 4.

[39] Schmidt, Dov (Bertschik). 'My Journey to Kamenetz in 1965', pp. 175-81, in: Eisenstadt and Gilbart, *op. cit*., note 4.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 176.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 177.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid*., p. 178.

[44] Musevič, Georgii. "Otkrytoe pismo," in: *Naviny Kamianieččyny*, 14-15.01.1998.

[45] Musevič, *op. cit*., note 2, p. 87.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 89.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] This story was first published by Mikhail Mamus in *Naviny Kamianieččyny*, 18-02.1998.

[49] Musevič, *op. cit*., note 2, p. 91.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Mamus, *op. cit*., note 48.

[52] All Jewish cemeteries were vandalized and destroyed after the Jews of the area were murdered.

[53] Musevič, *op. cit*., note 2, p. 100.

[54] Snyder, *op. cit*., note 1, p. 402.

Jewish photographers of the Mahilioŭ region in the 20th century

Alexander Litin

The article focuses on the Jewish photographers from the Mahilioŭ region, ranging from the beginnings of photo artistry until today. The text lists concrete persons, showing the distinct features of their creative style. The author describes the existence of the Mahilioŭ school of photography, that was formed mainly by masters of Jewish ethnicity. The author is the first in stressing the importance of the regional principle in studying photo-materials, as it allows for their complete listing and the definition of their local peculiarities.

Among the activities in which the Jews of Mahilioŭ dominated, both before and after 1917, one of the top places belonged to consumer services, as we might call them today. Most tailors, shoemakers, barbers were Jews, and it was taken for granted. Photography was one of these activities. It included both the professional photographers, serving the consumers, as well as newspaper and art photographers. This "Jewish employment niche" remained relevant for almost the entire 20th century, albeit slightly modified.

Rapid development of photography in the Russian Empire took place in the second half of the 19th century. Commercial photographers appeared also in Mohilev. It is worth noting, however, that none of the four photo studios in this provincial center, by the end of the 19th century, belonged to Jews. Apparently, Jews initially sized up this new business and chose not to risk investing money in it. In addition, this business being quite expensive, was not focused on poor customers. In order to show the roots of photography in Mohilev, let us go back a few years.

According to most researchers, it was in 1820 in Mohilev where one of the first Russian photographers Henry (Andrei) Denier was born, in the family of a Swiss citizen Johann Denier. He achieved unquestionable success in the portrait photography salons of St. Petersburg - the imperial capital. In the 1860's Denier was awarded the title of "Photographer to Their Imperial Majesties," and thus gained the right to display the Imperial coat-of-arms on his products.[1]

Apparently, it was in Denier's studio where Sigizmund Jurkowski (1833 -1901) embarked on his way to photography. It is Jurkowski, who for good reason can be called a Belarusian photographer. His birthplace is unknown. Some sources suggest that it was Nezhin in today's Ukraine. However, no documents confirming this fact are provided. It seems quite possible that Jurkowski was born in the Mohilev province. This is indirectly confirmed by his studies at the Mohilev gymnasium (in 1850 he graduated from the 5th class)[2], and later by his public service in Cherikov as a county solicitor (prolocutor for private cases in commercial courts) in 1861-65.[3] In 1867, Jurkowski opened his photographic studio in Vitebsk and later became the photo-chronicler of this city.[4]

One of the first photostudios in Mohilev emerged in the early 1860s in the Hall of Nobility on the Shklovskaya (today: Pieršamajskaja) Street.[5] It belonged to local merchant brothers – Andrei and Grigory Prosolny. Afterwards, portrait photos produced by their studio started appearing in the family albums of Mohilev residents. These were printed on thick cartons with the address on the back side and the inscription: "the negatives are stored." The Prosolny brothers can justifiably be called the first professional photographers in Mohilev, who on their own initiative photographed the 1877-78 Russian-Turkish war. They were among the first war photographers in the Russian Empire, having achieved great prominence.

According to *Pamyatnye knizhki Mohilevskoy gubernii* (Memorial Books of the Mohilev Province) in 1892 there was also a photo studio owned by merchant Kosma Prosolny in Mohilev, most likely their relative. In the preface to the three-volume *Opyt opisaniya Mohilevskoy gubernii* (Experimental Description of the Mohilev Province) published in 1882, there is a reference to the photographer K.G. Prosolny who participated in processing of materials.[6]

By 1890, another photo studio emerged on the Dneprovsky Avenue (today: Pieršamajskaja Street). It was owned by Aleksandra L. Katanskaya, a noblewoman and daughter of a collegiate councilor. In the same year, two other photo studios were established by the nobility. The first one was owned by Semyon P. Aleksandrov (at the Lurie house at the Bolshaya Sadovaya Street), while the other – by Valentin I. Kublicki-Piottuch (the Granat house on the Dneprovsky Avenue). By 1899-1901 year new photographers started

working in Mohilev – the peasant Andrei Drakov, Pelageya L. Katanskaya (perhaps a relative of Aleksandra Katanskaya) and the first Jewish photographers – Leiba (Lev) Perelman, Sholom Dynin-Pechersky and Iuda Nemchenko.

By 1905, Jews owned four out of seven photo studios in Mohilev. In addition to the three mentioned above, there was one by Menahem Fishman (at the Bernstein house at 32 Bolshaya Sadovaya Street). The latest list of photographers known to the author dates back to 1914: Sholom (Solomon) I. Dynin-Pechersky, Mendel Z. Fishman, Dmitri I. Ivanov (the Litvin house at the Vilenskaya Street), Movsha-Shmuyla D. Chireshkin, Yitzchak I. Naimark, Matus S. Yakovlev. Over the years a number of other photo studios operated in Mohilev, those being owned by Georgi M. Drakin, M. Ostashevsky. E. V. Seletskaya, G. Sterin (Dneprovsky Avenue, 48) and B. Pecherin (Dneprovsky Avenue, opposite the railway station).

At that time almost all the photo studios in the province were owned by Jews.[7] All these photo studios existed up to the 1917 revolution, as evidenced by the portraits of our ancestors, who recorded their faces mainly by Jewish photographers for future generations.

Unfortunately, most of the Jewish photo studios usually limited themselves to everyday photos. Menahem Fishman may have been the sole exception. In 1908 his photos captured the celebration the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Liasnaja (a village near the town of Prapojsk, today: Slaŭharad), one of the most important battles of the Great Northern War. They were printed in *Pamyatnaya knizhka Mohilevskoy gubernii na 1909 god* (The 1909 Memorial Book of the Mohilev Province) and their originals are stored in the National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus in Minsk. In addition, Fishman is the author of several postcards depicting the city of Mohilev at the beginning of the 20th century. In one of them he subtly used a technique, now known as "hidden advertisement," when he placed the sign of his photo studio in the upper left corner of the card while picturing the Bolshaya Sadovaya Street (Belarusian: Vialikaja Sadovaja).

According to Mahilioŭ residents' recollections about the life in the city in the early 20th century, the main competition among the local photographers took place between Menahem Fishman and Movsha Chireshkin.[8] Here is a quote about Fishman from the book *Ves Mohilev na Dnepre: adres-kalendar* (The Entire Mohilev-on-Dnieper: address-calendar) published in 1912:

> The edge between photography and art is now erased, and they should complement each other in strict compliance. ...This, of course, applies to the high profile photographers. Among them is M. Fishman, the owner of the art photo studio... He established himself here when the photographic business in Mohilev was in its infancy, when it contained gross technical errors and vulgarity... Fishman's works... were awarded several major awards. This photo studio provides its services to all governmental and public institutions, arranging their group photos according strictly artistic quality, rather than just being cheaply popular. The studio follows all the innovations in the field of photography. When a visitor enters the reception or the gallery of the studio, which is furnished with all the up-to-date luxury hardly imaginable for a provincial photo studio, he is imbued with confidence in the flawless execution of the order.[9]

Even, while considering the typical advertising style, one should not ignore the award "For Work in Art" awarded to Fishman in Mohilev in 1902, or the gold medals from the exhibitions in Vienna in 1906 and Paris in 1907 (though all these exhibitions were not totally photographic). Unfortunately, we lost track of Fishman's later career. We know only that he continued working in Mohilev in the first post-revolutionary years. His last known photographs (usually the group ones) date back to the late 1920s.

More is known about the photographer Movsha-Shmuyla D. Chireshkin. He was born in Minsk in 1875. His family name was changed by Russian clerks who converted it from Tsireshkin to Chireshkin. He started practicing photography at an early age and settled in Mohilev before the 1917 revolution. The family was quite wealthy – photography was not an activity for the poor people. His daughter Rakhil attended the gymnasium and in her free time earned pocket money by helping her father at the photo studio. The governor of Mohilev was well acqainted with Chireshkin. The family had a servant, a woman from the village. The family was secular and religion was practiced merely as a tradition. However, on Sabath, Chireshkins did not light the stove. Before the revolution, Movsha-Shmuyla D. Chireshkin traveled to Germany to supply his photo studio with chemicals and photo paper. He bought them only at Kodak. His photo studio continued to function even after 1917.

According to the personally completed questionnaire in 1920, all the materials were at that time purchased at the Cinema Committee. The

workload was only a half of what existed before the First World War, however, in addition to private customers, the Mahilioŭ Economic Council placed some orders. Around 1930, his photo studio was taken over by the "Prychiĺniki dziaciej" (Friends of Children) organization and eventually Chireshkin himself started working there as part of the photography team. He did not want to be evacuated when the Second World War started. He said that he knew the Germans as a civilized nation. Later, he decided to leave, but he and his wife failed to catch the departing train and had to come back. According to the testimony of his Belarusian neighbor, when all the Jews were forced into the ghetto, he was forced to clean up the city, sweeping the streets. Like thousands of other Jews of Mahilioŭ, Chireshkin and his wife were killed by the Nazis.

In the 1920s the back side of his photographs was stamped "M. Chireshkin-the older", because his younger brother Isaac also worked as a photographer in Mahilioŭ at that time. Some time before the 1917 revolution, Isaak Chireshkin worked as a photographer in Vitebsk, later serving in the Imperial Lancers regiment (thanks to his physical appearance).

After the revolution, he moved to Mahilioŭ and started working in his brother's studio. In the early 1920s he opened his own studio, which enjoyed popularity. During World War II, he and his family managed to leave for Tashkent. In 1946 he moved to Leningrad. Until the age of 80 he worked there as a photographer at "Inrabis." Movsha's son Simon also followed in his father's footsteps. He was a front-line photoreporter. After the war he lived in Minsk where he died in the late 1990s.[10]

Another prominent name among the Jewish photographers of Mahilioŭ is that of Leiba L. Perelman. His studio was located in his own one-story house. Like most photographers of that time, he personally photographed the clients, developed and printed the photos, and maintained all financial records. One of his 1901 photographs depicts Pavel Y. Korolev (1877-1929), a graduate of the Mohilev Theological Seminary and the father of Sergei Korolev, the founder of Soviet practical cosmonautics. Perelman raised two sons and four daughters, who moved to Moscow in the mid-1920s (the eldest of the children, Joseph went to Belgium before the First World War). One of the daughters, Rakhil graduated in 1918 from the Medical Faculty of the University of Moscow and married a fellow student and countryman Avraam Zingman. Their son visited his grandfather in Mahilioŭ in 1927. In fact, it is his childhood memories that shed light on some of the moments of Leiba Perelman's life. According to his grandson, the Perelman's photo studio continued his work after 1917 and was located in a house on Vialikaja Sadovaja (today: Lieninskaja) Street.

In the late 1920s an active campaign was started among the Jews to move to the Jewish Autonomous Region located in the Russian Far East. The Perelman family was also affected. Leiba considered this option for a long time, but decided instead to move at the end of 1928 to Moscow, where his children lived. According to his grandson, Leiba Perelman was a relative of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922) (whose real name was Lazar Perelman) who is often regarded as the reviver of the spoken Hebrew language. However, the Perelman family dared only to whisper about this kinship.[11]

Virtually nothing is known about the life and work of Sholom Dynin-Pechersky, another photographer from Mahilioŭ. Some information can be gleaned from the memoirs of his granddaughter Nata I. Konysheva, a well-known Moscow artist who was born there in 1935. In the 1930-s Dynin-Pechersky lived with the family of his daughter Ida on the first floor in a small two-room apartment in the Taganka area in Moscow. However, Nata Konysheva's memories about her grandfather remained quite dim. She did not know when and why her grandparents Sholom and Sarah moved to Moscow, although the archival data clearly indicate that in 1921 Sholom Dynin-Pechersky was still living in Mahilioŭ. Neither did she know, whether her grandfather worked as photographer in Moscow and when and where he died. We can only state with confidence that the grandfather was absent in Konysheva's post-war life. Sholom Dynin-Pechersky had three sons and three daughters. Konysheva recalls:

> the grandfather in my memories was a calm and intelligent man with a small beard and a mustache. It seemed to me in my pre-war childhood that he was some kind of an artist. I did not understand, what photography is, though a big old advertising cardboard with the inscription "Photo by Dynin" and numerous glass plate negatives and photographs were kept in our house. Almost nothing of this wealth survived the war.[12]

Before focusing on the photographers of the Soviet period, it seems reasonable to mention another fact, very important in terms of preserving the historical heritage of the Jews of Mahilioŭ.

These are the unique images of the Synagogue in the area of Školišča. They were made by Solomon Yudovin (1892-1954), a photographer and artist from Vitebsk. While taking these photos, this young man from the small borough of Biešankovičy, was a beginning artist who knew how to handle the camera, thanks to his work as an apprentice at the Vitebsk photo studios and being a student at the "School of Drawing and Painting" led by Yudel Pen. In 1913 Yudovin arrived in Mohilev as a part of an expedition led by An-sky (Shloyme-Zeinvil A. Rappoport). Yudovin made numerous photos of the wall paintings of the wooden synagogue. These photos are now the property of the Jewish Heritage Center "Petersburg Judaica" at the European University in Saint-Petersburg. Confirmations of this episode are kept in the materials of the "Society of Jewish Antiquity" in Vilna. One of its members who arrived in July 1913 in Mohilev for examination of the synagogue, testified:

> An-sky was here this summer. Fourteen pictures were made: two external and twelve internal. An-sky took [large format] negatives (18x24 mm). Here photographer Dynin has only three prints… (the author is grateful to Veniamin Lukin for sending a copy of this document – AL).[13]

In the post-Revolution period the photographic services remained mainly a Jewish business. By the early 1920s most of the photo studios in the city were private. While the old photographers mentioned above continued to work, new photographers opened their studios. According to the registration questionnaires the following photographers offered their services in Mahilioŭ: Movsha-Shmuyla D. Chireshkin (Pažarny Lane 42), Sholom I. Dynin-Pechersky (Vialikaja Sadovaja, 48), Matus S. Yakovlev (Novačarnihaŭskaja, 42), Iser D. Makhlin (Vilienskaja, 35) Menahem Z. Fishman (Vialikaja Sadovaja, 32), Peisakh B. Sverdlov (Dniaproŭski Avenue, 28), Ilya S. Hanin (Dniaproŭski Avenue, 28), Mordukh A. Yasin (Vilienskaja, 13), Aba Lurie (Dvaranskaja). One of the few non-Jewish photographers was Ignatiy Ivanov (Strušnia, 52). As most of the photographers indicated in the questionnaires, the number of orders decreased significantly after 1917. It was probably true, although none of the photographers were in a hurry to inform the tax office about the increased profits. The archives of the Mahilioŭ regional museum include numerous copies of photos from the early post-revolutionary years, which depict local Bolsheviks and young Communists. These photographs were definitely made in a studio, but the authors are not known. The authorities jealously tracked all profitable businesses and intended to commandeer the photo studios. Thus, on January 5, 1921 the district bureau of professional industrial unions informed the Economic Council that "in view of the existing chaos," it established a commission to examine the photos studios and to set fixed prices for them. The outcome of this initiative is not known, but some photo studios did remain private until 1941. In fact, in their reports, the tax inspectors relied not only on documents, but also on "polling of well-informed persons" and "on-site inspections". None of the available questionnaires indicate the presence of hired workers or the assistance of family members, although sometimes the auditors harbored suspicions. In 1920's Isaac Chireshkin built a small unheated pavilion at the Lieninskaja Street, where he produced "photo postcards", "studio photos", photos for certificates, membership cards, etc. To prove that his wife "was not trained as photographer and did not have necessary qualifications" and thus did not work with him, Chireshkin provided a certificate signed by Azarkh, Lurie and other photographers from Mahilioŭ. This certificate was accepted, but he still was not able to prove that he did not work in minus 20-30°C in this cold plywood shack. Chireshkin filed requests for income tax reduction each year since 1930. He reported that the plywood pavilion "is not equipped for work in autumn, spring and winter periods." Thus, during these months he "does not earn enough for the support of his family" and was forced to sell things. However, not one of his claims was accepted. The auditors noted that he was a highly skilled photographer, "filled with orders, without operational downtime and financially sustainable." Meanwhile Isaac Chireshkin joined the photoshop "Čyrvony svietapis" (Belarusian for: Red Photography) as a high class expert, without closing his private business. A report from 1931 demonstrated that the studio of Isaac Chireshkin was the last private photo business in the city. It was closed at the beginning of 1941. On April 1, 1941 Chireshkin filed a petition to have his license cancelled "due to the exorbitant income tax."[14]

By March 1925 there were 468 self-employed tradesmen in Mahilioŭ. The most numerous group among them were the shoemakers (138 persons), while the number of photographers stood at four persons. According to the information that Rozalia Kirzner collected about her relatives, in the prewar time, in addition to Aba Lurie, his father Isaac and brother Zalman worked as photographers in Mahilioŭ.

Another photographer was their cousin Grigory (Getz) Sterin who left Mahilioŭ at the age of 27-28 years. He was known as a master of the double portraits, when the imprint was made from the double negative (so-called sandwich).[15] In the prewar years when the private photo studios were mainly replaced by photo shops, emerged a new generation of young photographers, energetic, and full of new ideas. Among them were Naum Dubnikov, Zelik Zalmanson, Grigory Rog and others, who later formed the basis of postwar personal photo services in Mahilioŭ.

The war, evacuation and the Nazi occupation badly restricted our ability to research the prewar photography of Mahilioŭ. The terrible war not only killed the people, but also destroyed the visual memory of them and their places of residence. Very few photos of this period remained. The information about the creative artistic photography disappeared completely. This is understandable, since photography was an expensive activity, unaffordable for the majority of its followers. Only a few nameless pictures with views of the city of the 1930s are kept in the Mahilioŭ regional museum. One can only hope that photographs of this period are still stored somewhere in family archives, but only a few of them are known to us today.

One of the family albums in Saint Petersburg preserves the photos made in the 1920-30s in Mahilioŭ by Boris Zhorov, brother of the renowned sculptor from Mahilioŭ, Abram Zhorov. A native of Mahilioŭ, Boris Zhorov (1906-1970) who painted since his childhood, was engaged in self-education and studied foreign languages. With his friends, the Gordon brothers, Boris organized a literary society named after V. G. Korolenko in early 1920s. They published a handwritten journal *Vozrozhdenie* (Revival), designed by Zhorov. After graduation from a school in Mahilioŭ, Zhorov moved to Leningrad. He became a student at the Faculty of graphics of the Academy of Arts, but had to quit, lacking living means. He eventually graduated from the Polytechnic Institute with a degree in electrical engineering. As a keen photography enthusiast, Boris left a large photo archive. It contains some unique photos of Mahilioŭ and excellent examples of the family photos, taken by him during his visits to his native city.[16] I wish to focus on one piece of photographic art. The photograph depicts Jewish children in a homemade frame shaped as the Star of David. The photo was made in the prewar years and its author is unknown.

Oddly enough, the life of the city during Nazi occupation is recorded quite fully. Of course, the authors of these photos could not have been from Mahilioŭ and, understandably, they could not have been Jews. The man with the camera could not have been a local resident, but rather a Nazi soldier or officer. As it turned out, there were quite a few such people among the invaders. Some of them happily posed in front of the ruins, while others took photos of the local residents and the cityscape. But should we thank these photographers for photos that show the execution of Mahilioŭ underground resistance members or the final images of the Mahilioŭ ghetto prisoners?..

After the liberation of Mahilioŭ the war moved westward. The city laid in ruins and was painfully reviving. Was photography of main concern then? It does not seem so. However, the first postwar photo studios emerged quite soon. In addition to purely technical needs, the desire to record their images did not leave the residents of the city in these difficult years. Yakov B. Rog (born in 1919) started working as an aprentice in the photoshop "Čyrvony svietapis" when he was twelve. In 1946, immediately after the war, he opened a photo studio in his house located on the Pieršamajskaja Street between the Lenin Square and the railway station. There were many customers who needed photos for documents or just for themselves. Photos were taken with a pretty background painting showing a graceful stairway and scenery. Frequent customers were the soldiers and officers from the military unit in Paškava. Yakov Rog provided services for the Mahilioŭ Drama Theater, and the visiting tourists ordered the large photo advertisements and portraits from him.

By the end of the 1940s there was the shop of the handicapped "Mahinpram" and the self-serve shop "Proletary". The latter was transformed into a consumer services center and it housed all the existing photo studios. The photographers of that time were mostly Jews: Semyon L. Batuner, Naum Y. Dubnikov, Tevie Galper, Isaak Gorodnitsky, Lev Epstein, Abram Simons. Grigory Y. Rog recalled:

> Russians (i.e. non-Jewish Slavic population – BR) often came to get a job, but, as a rule, after six months of training, they left and did not return. I can not even say what was the reason for that. The atmosphere in the photo studios was business-like, but frank and friendly. For me it was a normal, comfortable environment, and I did not feel anything particularly Jewish. The only thing that the Yiddish language was often heard: those who knew the language spoke it to each other, but it felt quite natural. [17]

Here is another recollection by him:

> In those days I visited any photo studio in Mahilioŭ as if I was at home. And as it is already clear, only Jews worked there at that time. I can recall many names: Ziama Rahinstein worked at the railway station, Simons likewise worked there, Dubnikov – in the central photo studio in the Lieninskaja Street, Zalman Vernikov – in a small wooden studio in Lupalava. Also there were Frenk, Girshman, Yakov Milman. Max Kuznetsov later moved to Israel. There was a very good photographer Sasha Marzon. He was the first who tried to make pictures with mirrors which at first got a hostile reception from the other the photographers. Later they acknowledged that this technique has the right to life. He worked at the Pieršamajskaja Street (this house does not exist today) and was very popular among customers, because he made good psychological portraits and, in general, he was very creative. One of the best photographers was Zelik Zalmanson... Of course, they did not produce solely masterpieces, but it is understandable because it is neither possible, nor necessary in consumer-oriented photography. Yet there existed also elite photographers who were not after just maintaining a schedule, but imbued their work with soul. In my opinion, these were Rog, Zalmanson and Dubnikov. They were the ones who could reveal the inner essence of a person. In my opinion, Semyon L. Batuner, who was the head of the 1st Photo Studio, was not duly appreciated. Several times I attended the photographers' meetings. As it is already clear, only Jews were there. It was all a "circus": I was literally dying of laughter when they argued. The Jewish specificity was felt even in the fact that they drank very little. This positively distinguished them even in purely customer issues. They always performed on schedule. They conducted their business affairs very responsibly, managing to stay current in terms of creativity, and to participate in artistic home photography exhibitions which started after 1950.[18]

Naum Yakovlevich Dubnikov (born 1910) took part in the construction of the photo studio next to the cinema "Čyrvonaja Zorka" (Red Star), as well as the studio near the railway station. It was Dubnikov who trained photographers in reviving the service sector after the war. In addition, he was reputed to be a great innovator: having invented and developed the design of the shutter in large studio cameras, as well as a charger add-on unit, which enabled the photographer to obtain several images from one negative.[19]

Isaak S. Gorodnitsky (1930-1987) started his photographic work at the age of sixteen as an apprentice in the T. Galper's photo studio located at the Bychaŭski market. Over time he became an excellent master of all photographic and related processes. He could shoot, develop, print both in black and white and in color, and to perfectly touch up the photos. He became one of the few commercial photographers who reached the highest category.

In the early postwar years Abram I. Rivkin (born in 1921) was the leading photographer of the *Mahilioŭskaja Praŭda* (The Mahilioŭ Truth), the only newspaper published in the city at that time. He worked at the newspaper from December 1,1946 till about 1959. Journalist Nina N. Kotliarova remembered this about her colleague Abram I. Rivkin:

> Arkady, as we all then called him, was probably the first postwar photoreporter at the *Mahilioŭskaja Praŭda*. I know that he studied at the Leningrad Institute of Fine Mechanics and Optics. He was considered a brilliant photographer, a reliable worker and a wonderful person. We did not have cars, so he took his bag and happily walked to reach his assignment. He never allowed himself to cash in on the assigned photography: he often produced entire exhibitions for the collective farms for free. He was dismissed from his job in the late 1950s as a result of some slanderous accusation. But I am talking about it from hearsay. Arkady immediately got a job at the electromotor plant and was viewed as a good engineer. He finished his career as the deputy chief of the construction design bureau. In the 1990's he left for Israel.[20]

It was in fact a strange story, that appeared in the editorial order dated April 7, 1959. The basis of the order was the accusation that on the photo published on April 1, 1959 Rivkin "added the words which gravely distort the meaning of the visual promotion in the collective farm name after Kirov in the Kiraŭsk district." He was deprived of the honorarium but the newspaper still published his photos. He was on vacation in the summer of 1959, and returned to the office in August. However, his personal file does not contain any further information about his work at the newspaper.[21]

The 1950s were marked by the start of art photography among amateur photographers in Mahilioŭ. In the later years, Zinovy Shegelman (1940-1999) became one of the founders of the photo club movement and artistic photography in Belarus. Karl I. Yanovitsky, one of the first amateur photograhers in Mahilioŭ, recalled:

> Upon my return to Mahilioŭ in 1961 after my studies, I got acquainted with Zinovy Shegelman who worked as pediatric surgeon. Photography had already occupied the first place in his life. He was the master for me. He exhibited in Leningrad and other cities. I was impressed with his care and mastery of making large photographs. The work took

place in my communal bathroom for a period of four years. Then someone said that Adam Rogovsky created a photo club under the auspices of the railway. Zinovy and I joined it.[22]

Gradually, the unorganized amateur photography of Mahilioŭ seamlessly joined the photo club movement which emerged in the USSR in the 1960's. The photo clubs' role was defining for the art photography development in the Soviet Union at that time.

In 1967 another photo club appeared in Mahilioŭ: the "Jupiter" film studio was organized by Mikhail M. Raitses at the "Strommašyna" plant. The film studio included the photo studio "Čas," it had an excellent laboratory and made good movies. In January of 1972 the Mahilioŭ city department of culture allocated premises at the city culture center (Pieršamajskaja Street, 34) for amateur photographers and staffed regular office personnel to serve their needs. Thus, the "Viasiolka" (Rainbow) photo club emerged. Its photography section was headed by Zinovy Shegelman and in two years it already had 28 members.

In fact, thanks to two prominent masters and enthusiasts, one the Jew Zinovy Shegelman and the other, a Belarusian Pavel Tsishkouski, art photography started to develop in the city. These two personalities became the founders of the Mahilioŭ art photography school. In October 1976, being already quite well known in the Soviet Union, "Viasiolka" became the first Belarusian photo club awarded the honorary title of "Popular Amateur Assembly."

A very important role in the development of the photographers' skills was the information that described the activities of their fellow colleagues, both locally and in other regions. The Internet did not exist then. Maintaining the creative contacts, exchanging collections with the leading clubs of the USSR, the organization of seminars and exhibitions, was most significant for the photoclubs' development.

Communications with other countries, including the "enemy countries," were totally unusual at that time. The contacts of the Soviet people with foreigners were not welcomed. However, the photographs were being sent to photo exhibitions all over the world and were awarded with medals and prizes there. This activity was handled personnally by Zinovy Shegelman and he was later repeatedly censured for it.

In 1977 Mahilioŭ hosted the First Inter-republican Exhibition of children's photographs "The world through the eyes of the young." Fifty six photo clubs from the different parts of the USSR took part in it. The jury was chaired by Zinovy Shegelman, the head of the artistic photography club at the Mahilioŭ Palace of Young Pioneers and Schoolchildren.

In 1976 the city also hosted the first inter-club exhibition of photographic miniatures "Mini photo "Rainbow-76" (the size of the presented photoprints was 18x24 cm). The exhibition consisted of 157 photos and attracted 86 photographers representing 17 photo clubs from Belarus, Estonia, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. The third inter-club exhibition of photographic miniatures "Mini photo-82" received about four thousand works not only from the Soviet Union, but also from the United States, Japan and many European countries. Without exaggeration, Mahilioŭ for a short period of time became the center of photography.

Vadim Nekrasov, correspondent of the magazine *Sovetskoye Foto* (Soviet Photo) and a member of the jury, wrote that the exhibition in Mahilioŭ is a sort of search for "the most characteristic features of the miniature photography, its expressive means, and demonstration methods." Zinovy Shegelman was the chairman of the organizing committee which was inviting photographers to participate in the fourth exhibition "Mini photo-82". However, it never took place. In fact, 1982 was not only the peak of the creative photography in Mahilioŭ, but also the beginning of its downfall.

The repression against the most publicized photo exhibition and its organizers had already started in the course of its preparation. Eight hundred copies of the exhibition catalogue were seized. Zinovy Shegelman was charged with using the word "international" in the exhibition's name. The Soviet ideology of that time saw it as quite unacceptable for some sleepy Mahilioŭ to host such an exhibition. The exhibition "Mini photo-82" was closed and Zinovy Shegelman was expelled from the photo club "Viasiolka". He tried to organize another similar photo exhibition under "cover" of the"Jupiter" film studio at the "Strommašyna" plant. The film studio included a photostudio "Čas," and was headed by his old friend Mikhail Raitses. Was it Shegelman's naivete, misunderstanding of the "rules of the game," or a determination, bordering on desperation?

In 1983 the *Mahilioŭskaja Praŭda* published an article *Piena* (Foam), a typical example of the Soviet demagogy. This articlefinalized the total destruction of the photo club "Viasiolka" and fo-

cused its accusations on the exhibition organizer Zinovy Shegelman. Here are some quotes from this article: "…the genre's poverty is alarming," "one-dimensional presentation of today's realities," "the labor topic is somehow extremely poorly represented," the exhibition presented

> the works from Austria, England, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Italy, Norway, the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Yugoslavia, Japan, and others. Of course, such representation is commendable, but it automatically requires much more exacting organization of the exhibition at the level of the Ministry of Culture of USSR, a truly qualified organizing committee. …Many members of the organizing committee had never seen the submitted works. In fact, the works were selected by an exceedingly narrow group headed by Z. V. Shegelman. …The pictures were selected in a way as if the organizers had intended to show the most unattractive part of humanity. …One looks and experiences a chill: people are sad, without a smile. It's like at a cemetery, when the photos of the dead people look at you from the gravestones. […The exhibition was] closed as inconsistent with the high demands of humanism, ideals, goals and objectives of a cultural exchange between the peoples of the planet. Naturally, it begs a question: how could a group of people barely competent in the questions of ideological work, organize such an exhibition? It appears to me that the answer is obvious -- complete lack of control, unbelievably minimized responsibility on the part of many workers at the relevant agencies for the assigned task.[23]

Zinovy Shegelman was thus virtually deleted from Belarusian photography. He was roundly accused of all mortal sins: anti-Sovietism, pornography, Zionism, and most importantly – excessive enthusiasm. For the Soviet regime this sin was almost deadly. However, the three years of complete oblivion did not break the artist. He responded to all the accusations with hundreds of new works and new awards at international exhibitions. Zinovy Shegelman participated in more than a thousand of national and international photo exhibitions and was awarded with hundreds of medals and prizes. Dozens of his personal exhibitions took place in the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Israel, the Baltic States, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine.

He was an honorary member of numerous photo clubs of the former Soviet Union, photographic federations of the United Kingdom, Argentina, Poland, the United States and of other countries. Only the perestroika allowed the artist to emerge from the "underground."

In 1986, he initiated the organization of the provincial photo club "Mahilioŭ" and became one of its leaders. Zinovy Shegelman worked in many genres and became a recognized authority in the portrait and landscape photography. His works are characterized by his undeniable talent, finesse and elegance. In 1988, he was one of the first in Belarus to obtain the Artiste distinction by the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP). In 1992 he received the Excellence FIAP title.

In 1990 Zinovy Shegelman emigrated to Israel and worked there in a hospital in Haifa. Shortly, he was able to organically integrate into the Israeli photographic milieu. He brought together not only the Russian-speaking photographers, but also the representatives of the local elite. Thanks to his initiative and his direct participation, the first (and so far the only) international photo exhibition in Israel, was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the founding of the state. In 1993, his exhibition "Viartannie" (Return) took place in Mahilioŭ and Babrujsk. So familiar Belarusian storks were imprinted on many Israeli landscapes. Every year Shegelman traveled from Israel to Belarus. Together with his friends and students he took photos of what had been shot for the nth time and also in finding something new. He died in Israel on the way to a photo-shoot on November 8, 1999.

It can be said with confidence that the Mahilioŭ school of photography, which was quite remarkable during the Soviet period, was largely formed by the Jewish photographers.

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The Holocaust tragedy in the oral history of Belarusians

Aleksander Smalianchuk

The article is based on materials acquired from oral history expeditions in various regions of Belarus, during which primarily autobiographical memoirs were recorded; along with them, a question about causes of the Holocaust was often asked (*Why did Germans kill Jews?*). The events of the Holocaust left a strong imprint in the memory of Belarus' inhabitants. The total destruction of a large ethnic group by the Nazis caused? a defensive reaction of the human consciousness. People had to generate their own assessment and understand the causes of the Holocaust as well as define their own attitudes concerning the Jewish tragedy. In similar situations, a person often develops his/her own view taking into account the position of the social, religious, national, or other group with whom he/she is identified. The oral memories of inhabitants of Belarusian villages create a fairly realistic image of the occupation. They lack one-sidedness in dealing with "ours" and "theirs." One perceives a rather critical attitude toward "ours." One may conclude that oral memories reveal the strength of stereotypes including the image of a passive victim incapable of resistance, the cowardliness of Jews, the unquestionable tolerance of Belarusians' attitude toward Jews in the interwar period, etc. Even now, these stereotypes continue influencing mass consciousness.

Today, oral history is a method of historical research that studies verbal memories provoked by a researcher who determines their method of collection (interviews), storage and analysis. Launched in 2011 at the instigation of a historian Iryna Kashtalian, the Belarusian Oral History Archive is the center of these studies in today's Belarus.[1]

Contemporary scholars of oral history emphasize that interest in the unwritten is caused not only by the fact that for various reasons (political, religious, ethical, social and cultural, etc.) certain societies cannot write, but also because these unwritten materials are fundamentally different from written ones. Accordingly, the main objective of oral history as a method of historical research is to "eavesdrop on what the community in question could not or did not want to say about itself."[2] As a classical scholar of oral history, Paul Thompson emphasized the idea that direct contact of an oral historian with the past is an illusion, especially when it comes to retrospection.[3] British historian John Tosh admitted, "[t]he voice of the past is also inevitably the voice of the present."[4] Polish anthropologist Jan Kordys argued even more explicitly:

> What we call life experience is a subject of constant restructuring: we constantly rewrite history, reassess people's actions and the events which belong to the past.[5]

In recent years, oral history has been dominated by the approach which emphasizes the narrator's subjectivity as the epicenter of the research focus. Italian historian Alessandro Portelli noticed in this respect:

> Oral sources tell us not only what people did, but also what they were going to do, and what [...] they now think about it. [...] A subjective perception of the events belongs to the competence of a historian to the same extent as do events of the material world. What the informants believe in is a historical fact (a fact of faith) to the same extent as are real events.[6]

While discussing the accuracy of this type of sources he further argues that:

> there are no "unreliable" oral sources, and their peculiarity is that even the messages that may be deemed "inaccurate" require historical explanation. "Errors" of the narrator sometimes give us more for understanding the past than the factually accurate stories.[7]

The sense of the past, held by the respondent, consists of immediate impressions combined with a personal understanding of the nature of the social world in which he or she lives. We know almost nothing about the role of these elements in the historical consciousness of the population which is rightly called "the silent majority of history."[8] However, the process of assimilation and interpretation of one's own experience by social groups is also a factor of historical development.

It should be considered that people's behavior is sometimes determined not by their real situation, but by often erroneous ideas about this situation. To a large extent, their ideas depend on specific behavior patterns which are based on what is called "life experience" and are primarily a product of culture.

Today, scholars of oral history are merely preoccupied not with fact finding, but with understanding the meaning of what people emphasize while describing a certain fact. This meaning is present and often dominates the process of re-

membering. Moreover, a certain interdisciplinary competence is required. This competence was described by Polish scholar Marcin Kula as historical sociology and psychology.[9] The anthropological competence of the scholar can also play an important role in this process.

A wealth of meaning is felt in oral histories focused on reflection on the last war and the Holocaust in the memory of Belarus' inhabitants. Respondents were residents of Belarusian villages in the regions of Hrodna, Brest, Viciebsk, Homieĺ and Minsk. They were predominantly women, adherents of the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox faiths, born in the first third of the 20th century. The oldest respondent was 95 years old while the youngest – 70 to 75. Their education was usually limited to a few classes of Polish or Soviet elementary school. Interviews were conducted from 2006 to 2013. By 2010, memories were recorded on the basis of questionnaires. Later data collection was dominated by freely-narrated autobiographical stories followed by the questions, including those on the causes of the Holocaust.

The tragedy of the Jews in Belarus forced their neighbors to seek explanation for what happened before their eyes and determine their own attitude toward mass murder and abuse. It was necessary to find a rationale and somehow reconcile oneself with "the doomsday" in which people had to live. This interpretation is often based on certain ethnic stereotypes, as well as on information that people had before or during the war. By the way, Nazi propaganda accused Jews of a world Zionist conspiracy, "Judeo-Communism", and aspirations to subdue all the nations of Europe and achieve world domination.

One should consider the fact that the Holocaust was a taboo subject in the postwar period of Belarusian SSR history. Antisemitism was persecuted by Soviet law and simultaneously continued to exist even in certain forms of the state ideology. Soviet historians did not write about the massacre of Jews, school textbooks contained no information about the Holocaust, while modest monuments erected at the sites of murder usually featured inscriptions about the thousands of killed *Soviet citizens*.

In today's Belarus the endeavors of many private initiatives aimed at the return of memory about the Holocaust differ with the position of state bodies. The latter, for example, can be illustrated by the history school textbooks published in 2009-2010 which contain only a minimum of information on the issue of the Holocaust. Obviously, the responses of the non-Jewish population (mostly ethnic Belarusians) to questions about the causes of the Holocaust gave information on respondents rather than about the Jews or the events of the past. This is very well reflected in the excellent study by Polish anthropologist Anna Engelking on the identity of the residents of the Belarusian village at the turn of the 20th - 21st centuries.[10]

I should admit that during my expeditions, narration about the Holocaust in most cases started with questions by the researcher. Occasionally the respondents themselves started talking about the Holocaust. The extermination of Jews was for most respondents a horrible experience, but it was still only an episode of the last war. The general atmosphere of the tragedy could be illustrated by the words of one narrator who witnessed reprisals in the borough of Lienin (Žytkavičy district, Homieĺ region):

> And in general, Jews said, you'll take ours, and no one will take yours. There won't be anyone (*woman, born in 1933, recorded in 2012*)[11]

Stories of mass killings were filled with compassion. Many interlocutors cried:

> And once I remember [...] there was an old Jewess. She says: "Behold, Lenka, we all die, everyone, everyone will die. And you will live long-long" *(woman, born in 1922, recorded in 2012);*
>
> There were many-many [Jews in Lienin. They were] beaten and left in the pit, someone alive, someone dead. That pit was shaking. They said that much blood flowed from these graves. The blood flowed from the pit like a runlet (*woman, born in 1933, recorded in 2012*);
>
> Oh, they were good people. They were killed all together with the kids. They were killed in Naliboki. Oh, it's a pity! They were such good... (*woman, born in 1921, recorded in 2011*);
>
> And we went to see how the earth was moving ... I saw it with my own eyes. Alive. Later the people who watched it from afar told [...] they dug it for themselves. And then they were lined over this pit, machine guns fired and people were falling. Someone was even unwounded. Who knows what was there?! Indeed, I saw this living earth, how it stirred (*woman, born in 1925, recorded in 2011*);
>
> Under Poles Jews lived peacefully and under Russians peacefully alike. When Germans came, all Jews were killed. Killed to the last. There, in Lienin Jews were the majority. There's a cemetery, I know. And people told who lived there, blood flowed through the sand... So many people! They was maybe a thousand of them there, those Jews. All in a common grave. They perished in one grave (*woman, born in 1922, recorded in 2012*).

Interlocutors often wondered why the Jews did not resist, why they did not try to escape, to find refuge in the woods, among the guerrillas? However, usually this curiosity was formal. The victim's behavior complied with the stereotype of "a cowardly Jew."

> They went to their death like a rabbit to the boa [...] The partisans already were in the forest [...] There was a chance there, and here there was an evident death. Here Jews were driven to work. And who drove them? There was a scumbag (before the war they caught dogs). I do not remember his name. In any case, he steered the Jews and had a whip. And each of the Jews was taller by a head than the scumbag who led them. He beat them [...] bastard... (*man, born in 1928, recorded in 2013*);

> Jews were persecuted. They had this, well, as we have the holy father, a rabbi. He went in front and all Jews behind him. He told them, "We all perish." Jews themselves dug graves. They were laid down, shot to death, and others were laid down. And then they were filled up by the policemen (*woman, born in 1922, recorded in 2012*).

How did the respondents explain the reasons of the Holocaust? It should be emphasized that this question almost always caused a lot of wondering by the respondents who said they do not know the reasons:

> I do not know why they killed those Jews (*woman, born in 1916, recorded in 2006*);

> Jews themselves did not know why they were killed (*woman, born in 1930, recorded in 2011*).

We had to insist, look for another approach, ask to recall, for example, what the neighbors, relatives or parents said. For the majority of respondents, this issue obviously was not something which tormented and haunted them in the postwar years. For them it died with the Jewish community. Only after concerted efforts were the interlocutors able to produce answers and reflections on the causes of the Holocaust. The biggest group of responses was associated with the interlocutors' conviction that the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis was due to "trickery" (or alternatively "cleverness") of the victims and their unwillingness to work:

> They did not work, they just tried to live commercially (*man, born in 1924, recorded in 2006*);

> A Jew is a cunning person (*woman, born in 1910, recorded in 2006*);

> Because this is a cunning nation. Not needed. It will not work anyway (*man, born in 1930, recorded in 2007*);

> Jews did not work. They deceived people (*man, born in 1915, recorded in 2007*);

> Old people said: Germans do not like cunning, and a Jew is more cunning. A German will never deceive a Jew (*man, born in 1930, recorded in 2009*);

> Volf himself said: we have a rule, even for a penny, but you should deceive a person (*man, born in 1931, recorded in 2011*);

> People said: Jews are as cunning as Germans. They [Germans] did not like those (*woman, born in 1920, recorded in 2010*);

> And did they make any harm? (*woman, born in 1930, recorded in 2006*);

> There were rumors that a Jew killed some German. This caused the war (*man, born in 1931, recorded in 2011*).

In this case, the respondents in their private assessments of Jews conforms with the position of the German occupation authorities, who punished "cunning Jews" who "did not work [... and] just tried to live commercially." In this regard, the presence of old stereotypes is also evident.

In the view of the Belarusian peasants, one can only work on the land, trade and craft were not perceived as work, just as "an occupation." Accordingly, Jews immediately became a sort of loafer.

Perhaps, this transfer of guilt to the victim is not a fully meaningful appetence of the Belarusian interlocutors to justify their own observer's position in the situation when their good neighbors were killed before their eyes. The position "they are guilty themselves" relieved them from liability for inaction and helped them to find excuses.However, oral history has also helped to highlight a completely different aspect of perceptions of the Holocaust. Once after an expression of sincere sympathy for the perished, the following was said:

> Well, who knows what there could be [...] with us Slavs, if the Jews were not [killed]... So, they'd spawn us all already, we could not even turn ... So the people reasoned (*man, born in 1924, recorded in 2013*).

What has been heard brings to light certain criticism of the widespread claim about good Belarusian-Jewish relations in the pre-war period dominated by mutual respect and tolerance. Among these reasons mentioned by the narrators, Hitler's personal animosity towards Jews or even his personal revenge for certain grievances were featured:

> It was Hitler who issued the order [to kill Jews]. They said that his wife, Hitler's wife was a Jewess (*woman, born in 1924, recorded in 2011*);

> An old German said: when Hitler was young, Jews cured him (*man, born in 1921, recorded in 2011*);

> They said that a Jewess poked out Hitler's eye (*woman, born in 1929, recorded in 2013*);

Hitler is the son of a Jewess who gave him up (*woman, born in 1932, recorded in 2013*);

Jews did not allow Hitler to marry a Jewess (*woman, born in 1931, recorded in 2013*);

Hitler was from a poor Jewish family, others laughed at him. When he grew up, he revenged himself (*woman, born in 1933, recorded in 2007*).

The responses also contained the views on Jews as a cursed people, responsible for the murder of Christ:

They said, this is because they mocked Jesus Christ (*woman, born in 1940, recorded in 2007*);

They said, Jews are killed because of Christ (*man, born in 1933, recorded in 2007*);

Well, devil knows for what reason. Yet they say, that some Jews, uh, tortured Jesus Christ. Well, maybe they were guilty. And for that they are not liked [...] They annihilated Jews (*woman, born in 1922, recorded in 2012*);

All said that they, so to speak, have been already determined to endure this persecution. This nation was, so to speak, historically destined, determined to experience this. (*man, born in 1924, recorded in 2013*).

As a reflection of antisemitic propaganda in interwar Poland, the respondents from Western Belarus often mentioned the so-called "blood libel." However, stories that Jews allegedly use human blood while preparing the Passover matzah were usually accompanied by reservations, like:

So people were saying, and I do not know if it was true... God knows (*woman, born in 1921, recorded in 2011*).

However, few talked about it in jest:

Rumors were widespread, well, I do not know. They say they fast with Christian blood. They need just a little. And my friend once said: "Mrs. Brocha, give me at least some matzah with human blood" (*woman, born in 1927, recorded in 2011*).

Occasionally the alleged linguistic and origin "closeness" of Germans and Jews was featured as a reason:

They know the language [...] Their language is close (*woman, born in 1910, recorded in 2006*).

The residents of Belarusian villages viewed this "closeness" as a fact that led to intense competition between Germans and Jews. That is why, as one of the interlocutors said in her narration, Hitler started with the murder of Jews in his way to dominate the world:

To seize themselves, to achieve global domination themselves. As America today, as Poland. It does not matter that Jews are poor. It is important the nations are different. And Germans were afraid, I think; my opinion is [...] that if there are many nations, even many confessions, than like those fish, swan, pike and crayfish – each pulls to his own side. This hampers. And if all is the same – something happens then. And Hitler wanted exactly this, I think so, and many argued this way (*woman, born in 1925, recorded in 2011*).

One of the respondents, a person with higher education, who worked as a translator in a German economic organization during the war, in its response to the question about the causes of the Holocaust mentioned Antisemitism in interwar Poland, Nazi propaganda and... features of the Belarusian mentality:

People argued: They crucified Christ [...] This is the result of terrible anti-Semitic propaganda, calendars were sold, books where it was written that one should not buy from a Jew, terrible Antisemitism... Especially in 1938 and 1939. Also there was propaganda that they (and also Gypsies) harm progress ...

The Germans controlled all of Europe. Only Stalingrad remained [...] It was assumed that Germans are building "a new Europe." They said like this: "new Europe," "a new order." And all that impeded it had to be destroyed.

I think that it was also envy, because Jews had always lived better. Why did they live better?.. Izia's father worked in the forest and checked timber quality [...] It was not a big position [...] However, a barber visited him. A Jew does not guzzle away, lived frugally [...] He can convince you not to leave the store without buying... In the end, he collects the money ... And people do not see it. Huge envy arises [...] Unfortunately, our people is such... When people were deported or dekulakized, do you think that the neighbors were sorry? No, damn them! He did not lend me money, so that's right that he is taken... (*man, born in 1928, recorded in 2013*).

The rather broad context of interviews provided an opportunity to talk about local participants in crimes. People are usually reluctant to talk about it. For example, Evgeni Rozenblat and Iryna Yalenskaya, two oral history researchers from Brest interested in Slavic-Jewish relations in 1921-1953, indicated this reluctance to talk about "ours."[12]

During interviews people talked about "ours." Interlocutors recalled the police (for instance, in Slonim or in a village near Radaškovičy where people recollected a local policeman who killed Jews in revenge for relatives repressed by the Soviet authorities in 1937), village administrators and even partisans.

"Ours" as killers are often featured in oral memoirs of the residents of Belarusian villages. Sometimes they, and not the German occupiers,

are presented as the main evil of the last war. Perhaps the explanation for that could be that the most hope was awaited from "ours," but this hope was often in vain. During the war, the residents of Belarus had a big problem with natural human solidarity. A man with weapons dominated...

Local partisans also appeared as killers. Thus, a former partisan talked about partisan revenge against the Jews who fled to the partisan unit but did not give their gold to the partisans. According to the narrator,

> an angry commander who was convinced that Jews always have gold, ordered an attack on the German garrison in the neighboring village under the guise of a "human shield" of these Jews. When Germans and policemen shot Jews, the unit retreated to the woods (*man, born in 1924, recorded in 2006*).

The same "gold" or generally wealth often featured in the memoirs as the reason why Jews were first helped and then killed or betrayed to Germans.

> One can take the gold, and kill him. why to hide him?! And there was such [people]. Things do happen (*woman, born in 1924, recorded in 2007*);

> The village administrator betrayed [...] One family kept the mill. Jews were rich. When the rich were killed, [the murderer] took his pillows (*woman, born in 1916, recorded in 2009*);

> They lived in houses[...] And they were forced into one street [...] And they were surrounded with such wire. And then they were taken, they were beaten. I do not know, people said that there is a lake in Lienin... So, very much gold was thrown therein [...] into that lake. That was said by the people from Lienin (*woman, born in 1933, recorded in 2012*).

Nevertheless, people more often recalled the episodes of selfless assistance or a desire to help. In such cases there was no hint at money or some other form of gratitude of the Jewish fugitives. The danger of this assistance was emphasized. People also mentioned the cases when those who rescued Jews were punished. Human sympathy was even stronger than a fear of death.

> People felt compassion for them. Everyone knew Jews from Slonim, and they knew everyone [...] He did not cry. He only repeated: There is no one, there is no one. Please, forgive me. I have lost my family (*man, born in 1930, recorded in 2009*);

> I had a boy, and he as a neighbor came to our boy [...] And I came to the barn and called: "Sholom, Sholom, Sholom". I thought, he maybe hid somewhere... There was no one [...] And he was killed[...] And I was searching and searching for that Sholom. I thought I would give him clothes and hide... He is no more (*woman, born in 1916, recorded in 2012*).

The collected material requires careful study with the participation of representatives of various humanities disciplines. In the meantime, I should mention the evident desire of the Belarusian respondents to distance themselves from the tragedy of the Holocaust and justify their own neutrality or impartiality. There is no repentance in this position, but there is a desire to transfer the blame to the victim.

Often the stories of the Holocaust lacked sincerity, especially those recorded in Western Belarus which until the Second World War was a part of Poland. A change in tone was noticeable. Some interlocutors tried to avoid this topic replying with a question to our question or stating: "you know everything yourself..." Others referred to what they heard in conversations, etc.

Memories of pre-war residents of the Belarusian SSR (Eastern Belarus) lacked the tinge of anti-Semitism. For Jews respondents used the word *jaŭrei* (sing: *jaŭrej*) and avoided the term *žydy* (sing: *žyd*), which in this part of Belarus as well as in the Russian cultural space and among Jews from the territory of the former USSR is perceived as an insult. However, the respondents' views about the causes of the Holocaust hardly differed from what was heard in Western Belarus.

Oral memories of the Holocaust demonstrate the strength of stereotypes. Among them one can distinguish an image of passive victim incapable of resisting, cowardice, Jewish "gold," the alleged tendency of Jews to deceive, and tolerance of Belarusians towards Jews. These stereotypes also affect mass consciousness today.

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Memory of the Holocaust and Jewish identity in Belarus after 1991

Aliaksei Bratachkin

Attention to the issue of the Holocaust in Belarus became possible only after the second half of the 1980s, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The attention of the international community, scholarly organizations and charitable foundations had a great influence on this process. Having lost 80% of its Jewish population during the Holocaust, Belarus is not an exception. The problems of preserving this tragedy became an integral part of Belarus' national memory. At the end of the first decade of the 2000s two approaches to the issue of the Holocaust in Belarus emerged: from actual ignorance in the official discourse to the establishment of independent research on the part of Belarusian historians. The author undertook an analysis of the social-political, political, cultural, demographic context of memory of the Catastrophe of Eastern European Jews with the example of Belarus. Attention is drawn to the effect of Holocaust memory on the definition of Jewish identity in Belarus.

Introduction

This article is written on the basis of a small study conducted with the support of the Center for Advanced Studies and Education (CASE) at the European Humanities University (EHU) in 2012-2013.[1] There are two key questions to be addressed in my article: the first one is *what is happening today (in 2000s) with regard to remembrance of the Holocaust in Belarus*, and the second one is *how are the process of identity building (including Jewish identity) and the problematic of remembrance of Holocaust interconnected*?

These two questions will be considered in the context of the concept of "historical culture," one of the authors of which is the famous German historian Jörn Rüsen. According to his definition, "historical culture" includes

> strategies of scientific research, artistic forms, political struggle for power, formal and non-formal school education, organization of free time and other procedures of shared memory.

It is considered to be a "categorical function" connected with "normative positions." "Historical culture" has three dimensions: *aesthetic* (when historical memory is represented in artistic forms), *political* (when historical memory is used by some form of power in order to receive approval – legitimacy – from those influenced by this form of power) and *cognitive* (content of historical science). At the same time, there are complex relationships among the described dimensions: we face the phenomenon of mutual instrumentalization of these three dimensions, analysis of which allows understanding the distortions of historical culture and problems of historical memory. Notably, politicization of historical science and other consequences occur when there is an absence of autonomy of the political and cognitive dimensions. According to Rüsen, in every particular case (when researching communities) we face domination of one of the modes of historical culture over all the others.[2] Moreover, following the definition of Rüsen, historical culture is directly connected with the notion of historical consciousness:

> implementation of the mental procedures of historical consciousness in social communication can be called historical culture.

At the same time, historical culture is an area of identity construction.[3]

In fact, the article claims that the integration of memory of the Holocaust in Belarus, its public representation in different forms and research on the Holocaust in the Belarusian context are determined by the peculiarities of the type of historical culture that has been currently formed in Belarus. However, while working with memory of the Holocaust, we face a number of circumstances that go beyond the Belarusian context.

What is happening with memory of the Holocaust in Belarus?

It is worth starting with a general description of the situation concerning memory of the Holocaust in Belarus. The notion "Holocaust" as such started being actively used in the 1990s after the collapse of the USSR, when, along with the destruction of Soviet identity as a political project, attention started being paid to previously-censored events of Second World War history.

Both foreign Jewish organizations, the work of which was permitted, and Belarusian intellectuals, namely, Professor Emmanuil Ioffe, played their roles in promotion of the research problematic and memorization of the Holocaust events in Belarus.[4] Answering the question of what was happening with the integration of memory of the Holocaust further, it is very im-

portant to consider different aspects of institutionalization: whether it was possible to establish any organizations working on this agenda, create museums, integrate formal education in memorial culture and so on.

Such institutionalization is still ambiguous in nature, which can be seen along with the rise of the issues of preservation and memorization of Holocaust events. On the one hand, there is a Museum of Jewish History and Culture of Belarus, which opened in 2002. On the other hand, in fact, this museum was established with private (supported by the Joint), but not governmental initiative. Moreover, the question of to what extent the topic of the Holocaust is represented in state museums can also be raised.[5]

For example, the key points were interestingly highlighted at the exhibition, which was dedicated to Holocaust events and conducted in 2008 at the Belarusian Great Patriotic War Museum:

> The topic of exhibition doesn't set an objective neither to widely demonstrate the resistance of Jews in the ghetto, nor to portray their participation in guerrilla movements. Primary attention is paid to the tragedy of the Jewish people and to the self-sacrificing assistance provided by the local population, risking their lives and the lives of their relatives, while rescuing Jewish people and, in particular, their children. A part of the exhibition "Righteous among the Nations" is dedicated to this topic.[6]

The most controversial themes were left aside, when the actions of the non-Jewish population created the desired unproblematic image.

Problems with the installation of memorials to the Jewish victims of the Second World War on the territory of Belarus as a narrative of the death of *peaceful Soviet citizens*, which appeared in the Soviet era and are hardly replaced by the narrative of the memories of Jewish people in the context of the Holocaust events in Europe, can also be provided as an example.[7] Speaking about the system of education, according to a range of experts and researchers, the problem of the Holocaust is represented insufficiently.[8] Thus, the notion of "Holocaust" has started to appear in school textbooks only since the mid-2000s.

At the same time, the content of these books is focused to a lesser extent on the qualitative and in-depth consideration of this notion, when the newly emerged initiative of the introduction of the exclusive history class on history of the Holocaust remains unimplemented.[9] Meanwhile, there was a national competition on the topic of the History of the Holocaust, which was held several times, and its conduct in the Belarusian system of education wouldn't be possible without the permission of official structures.

Due to the absence of sociological polls, we also don't know what kind of attitude the citizens of Belarus have with regard to the problematic of the Holocaust and how they see these events many years after the end of the Second World War. However, readings of forums on the Internet and comments for articles mentioning the events of the Holocaust demonstrate a wide spectrum of attitudes, including both reflexive and antisemitic positions.[10]

In general, it can be said that integration of memory of the Holocaust into already established, pre-1991 perceptions meets various difficulties, and it is worth considering these difficulties and their causes in more detail. For example, the problem can be defined in the way it was formulated when Ukrainian researchers described their own situation with integration of memory of the Holocaust:

> coming back to the area of the official memory of Ukraine, the Holocaust was represented in a shortened "generally civilized" version, which remains external with regard to the main Ukrainian narrative of its national past.[11]

In our opinion, the Belarusian state and the existing political regime headed by President Aliaksandr Lukashenka are to a certain extent "guilty" in the creation of the perception of memory of the Holocaust as an "external" issue in Belarus. Only in 2008 did President Lukashenka participate in the official ceremony held close to the place of mass murders of Jewish people in Minsk - Memorial "Jama". Even this participation does not necessarily mean clear and positive state policies with regard to this question, especially taking into consideration the context of his visit. Probably, it was connected with the situation, when in 2007, during one of the press conferences several statements of Aliaksandr Lukashenka were considered to be antisemitic by Israel.[12] At the same time, there were also people in Lukashenka's circle of close associates, who worked for a long time with him and were distinguished by their antisemitic views.[13] However, one can hardly call state policies antisemitic. Most probably, it refers to a wider and different phenomenon, which is relevant to the instrumentalization of memory and history in state policies during the Lukashenka's epoch.

Lukashenka's accession to power in 1994 was connected with his reference to the idea of pres-

ervation of the Soviet legacy, which was widely supported under the conditions of the economic crisis of the first half of the 1990s.

Later, by the mid-2000s, the "Soviet legacy" gradually stopped being mentioned. Afterwards the primary focus was on the memory of "the Great Patriotic War" as the basis of Belarusian collective identity, and this memory was instrumentalized and partly "nationalized" (i.e. became less "Soviet" and a bit more "Belarusian"), in a way that it could be used for political purposes.[14]

To the contrary, it can be said, for example, that the historical legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was also instrumentalized and thus, the attitude toward it was changing from non-recognition to attempts to gain financial advantages through creation of tourist facilities. Or, the government has also instrumentalized the historical legacy of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR).

Thus, during Lukashenka's time, the narrative of establishment of the Belarusian state has been in fact tied with the creation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) in 1919, and the model of socialist and Soviet nationhood, but not with the appearance of the "bourgeois and nationalistic" Belarusian Democratic Republic. However, by the end of the first decade of the 2000s, the history of the BNR started being gradually incorporated into official historical discourse.[15]

The political regime in Belarus counted on a specific version of memory and history of events of the Second World War, and memory of the Holocaust fell victim not particularly to political (sometimes supposedly "antisemitic") manipulations, aimed exactly against it, but to the general attitude towards the history and memory of Lukashenka's period. The problem is that memory of the Holocaust infringes upon several canons, which are supported by the current regime, in particular the importance and number of victims. However, in official speeches it is not common to discuss how the victims were differentiated and the place occupied by the Jews. It is also obvious that the official narrative of "the Great Patriotic War" is built on the idea of the "sacrifice" and "heroism" of Belarusians, and quite often there is no space for events that do not fit the framework (such as, for example, collaboration and participation of the part of Belarusians in the Holocaust).[16] And, although the instrumentalization of history and memory by the political regime touched upon many historical themes and periods, it has its own peculiarities, which are not only connected with political manipulations, but also with the general policies (related to the sphere of the historical culture) of the writing of "national" history.

However, in our opinion, the instrumentalization of history and memory as a decision-making method in Belarus is one of the significant reasons for the ambivalent situation that was described in the beginning of the report, in which memory of the Holocaust remains with all its importance on the periphery and is hardly institutionalized.

With this governmental stance it is difficult to expect another approach, regardless that nowadays there is the possibility for grass-roots level initiatives implemented without state support in Belarus. In the context of this flip flop policy, it is feasible to consider different features of the situation, such as, for example, the lack of research works devoted to Holocaust events.

The first dissertation devoted to the history of the Holocaust was defended in 2000 in Belarus by a historian Evgeni Rozenblat,[17] and over the last fourteen years there have been three more dissertations defended (eight dissertations were also defended in Ukraine[18]).

Taking into consideration the fact that the majority of Belarusian historians work for state universities and academic institutions where the topic of works is coordinated and focused to a certain extent on the official "ideology of Belarusian nationhood," it becomes clear that the number of research papers on the Holocaust is also determined by the political environment. However, it is not only this environment that can be considered as determinative, but also the general situation with Belarusian historiography.

While analyzing the six-volume edition of *Historyja Bielarusi* (History of Belarus) published in 2000-2011, we can notice that the traditions describing the history of Jews and the Holocaust were already formed in the Post Soviet era (and even earlier) in Belarusian historiography.

The large-scale academic project implemented by the composite authors of the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus proposes the following view on the history of Jews who lived in Belarus: the description of this story occupies no more than fifteen full pages filled with monotonous factual knowledge. Jews are mostly described as part of the statistics of "ethnic minorities" or "demographic processes" or as the "religious community" that does not fit into the framework of Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

Of course, the comparability of the number of pages and actual events that have taken place in reality may be debated. However, the core problem is not in the qualitative variable, which can be always changed, but the approaches connected with the history of Jews in Belarus that dominate the analysis of the problematic.

This history is described in a classic way without any systematic research on the practices of co-residence of Jews and Belarusians; without consideration of how the practices of social, political, cultural and another inclusion and exclusion used to work; without analysis of the applied notions (Jews as a community of the 15th century significantly differs from the Jews of the 19th and 20th centuries) and so on. For example, the word "Holocaust" is not used in the fifth volume, in the chapters on the Second World War.

It can be at least explained by the absence of actual willingness of a number of historians to work with notions and definitions, which have come from the external context since the 1990s and breached the traditional narrative of the War created in the Soviet era.

However, if to draw attention to the fact that there are no references to the works of Belarusian historians working with the problematic of the Holocaust in historiographic review, which is prolegomenous to this fifth volume, the political bias of the authors of the issue becomes clear (regardless of the fact that one of the works is mentioned in the general literature review to the volume). How to understand this political bias - is it politically motivated, antisemitic or is it just about the peculiarities of national history writing in Belarus after the collapse of the USSR?

Another aspect is related to the genocide of Jews and the Holocaust, which have been solidly researched with the application of new methods only since the 1990s. It was an important event demonstrating the societal changes in Belarus. Nonetheless, the attention paid exclusively to this problematic, in the absence of a systematic and interdisciplinary approach that describes Jewish history in Belarus before the Holocaust in the historiographic tradition, establishes the study of the Catastrophe as the "issue in itself," and forms stereotypes in the collective consciousness.[19]

It is also obvious that regardless of the availability of Belarusian historians' works devoted to Jewish history, these topics rarely enter the public space. The communication between society and academia is disrupted.

Apart from that, the models of interpretation applied by Belarusian (and not only) historians in the description of the history of the Holocaust in the Belarusian context are extremely important. In this respect, one of the most interesting illustrations is the exchange of ideas between the former Soviet and current Israeli historian Leonid Smilovitsky and Belarusian historians Evgeni Rozenblat and Iryna Yalenskaya.

In 2000, Leonid Smilovitsky issued his monograph *The Holocaust in Belarus, 1941-1944*,[20] and the two Belarusian historians wrote an extended review of this book. One of the episodes discussed in the review is the interpretation of some collective and individual suicides and poisonings committed during the Nazi occupation of Belarus. From the point of view of Leonid Smilovitsky, who put these episodes into the section "Demoralization of the prisoners," they are an example of "demoralization."

Evgeni Rozenblat and Iryna Yalenskaya propose to interpret them absolutely differently:

> Both the willingness to share the tragic destiny with relatives and the collective suicides should be considered as acts of courage of self-renunciation and protest. While researching the problem of demoralization, in a sense of moral lapse and breakdown, it would be more appropriate to talk about the cases when Jews reported to the authorities disturbances of the regime in the ghetto; informed them about the plans of the resistance; gave away communists; tried to improve their financial conditions at the expense of other prisoners of the ghetto; tried to save their own lives by betraying their relatives and friends.[21]

From our point of view, both in the work of Leonid Smilovitsky and the Belarusian historians, review of the interpretation of the Holocaust events, which goes far beyond the positivist evaluation of the facts and consideration of the motives of human behaviour, is practically absent.

Contemporary Belarusian historians (who are to a certain extent retaining the traditions of "positivist historiography") are precisely lacking such interpretational schemes. It becomes clear, because some memories of witnesses have already been gathered, but there are no works, where all the memories would be interpreted in detail. Other evidence of such "peripheral memory" of the Holocaust in Belarus is its almost complete absence in the representation of these events in the popular culture (if to speak about Belarusian artistic products).

In the Soviet era, the only movie that discussed events of the Holocaust in the Belarusian context,

The Eastern corridor by Valentin Vinogradov (shot in 1966) was locked.[22] In the post-Soviet era, the reel devoted to the events of the Holocaust *Tufelki* (Shoes) partly funded by the Belarusian Ministry of Culture was made.[23] For political reasons, the Hollywood movie *Defiance* produced in 2008 by Edward Zwick, which tells the story of the Jewish Bielski partisans, who were acting in Belarus, was shot in Lithuania. It did not go to general release in Belarus and was cast late in the evening in frames of one of the Belarusian TV programmes.[24] Thus, taking all the aforementioned into consideration, it becomes clear that the problem of periphery and weak institutionalization of memory of the Holocaust in Belarus are at least connected by several reasons.

First, in the framework of the type of historical culture established in Belarus, the principle of autonomy of its three modes (political, aesthetic and cognitive) is infringed upon. Politics influence historical research, production of artistic products, processes of museumification and memorialization of the the Holocaust, presence of this issue in education and so on. Whereas, in the established type of the political culture, the trend of instrumentalization of memory and history, in a framework in which memory of the Holocaust is not considered autonomously from the politically biased version of the memory of the Second World War and the other political context, are considered to be typical.

Second, even in cases when autonomy from politics is at least partly possible (for example, when historians build strategies for interpretation of historical facts which are not directly connected to the current political context), some intellectual attitudes and habits mingling with the creation of the new perspective and restricting the ways of interpretation can be observed.

In particular, it is necessary to pay attention to the established historiographical tradition and other non-political phenomena in Belarus. From our point of view, we are speaking not about the political regime as a determinative factor in Belarus, but about cultural attitudes such as the understanding of "nation" (in this case, Belarusian), in the framework of which the history of Jews is given a very specific "peripheral" place.

How is identity formed in Belarus?

Where do these perceptions come from and what are these mindsets? In 1991, Belarus became independent and started its transformation into a nation-state. Per Anders Rudling emphasises that after the collapse of the USSR, "new independent states... appeared," some of which "did not have experience with national independence." This "gave a boost to the ethnocentrist narratives of history, focused mostly on the suffering of its own ethnic group," and the history of nation became associated with the history of the "titular nation."[25]

John-Paul Himka, a researcher of the Holocaust in the history of Ukraine, while speaking about the problems appearing with the integration of the Holocaust problematic into the Ukrainian national narrative, defines the essence of the ethno-centrist approach to history in the following way:

> I think that the moral of this story is in the way we treat others. At the same time, in diasporas we very often face the opposite trend: the moral of the story is in the way others treat us.[26]

Himka's retort is valuable, due to its description of the mechanism of the "ethno-centrist" reaction to the problematic of the Holocaust on the subjective level and the level of ordinary people.

What are other effects appearing with regard to the ethno-centrist approach to the writing of national history and supplementing it?

One of the typical effects is the already-mentioned aspect of victimization (victims are, first of all, "us"). The resulting mindset is aimed at the appearance of a specific "hierarchy of victims" and the resulting clarification of who suffered the most. This ascertainment started right after the end of the Second World War, took various forms in different countries and became a part of the phenomenon of the "cleaved memory of Europe."[27]

An ethno-centric reaction to the integration of memory of the Holocaust (with all its peculiarities) is a typical feature for both Belarus and Ukraine. On-going discussions on the problematic of the Second World War history, collaboration and the Holocaust confirm it.[28] However, analysis of these discussions demonstrates that ethno-centrism has not yet become the factor describing all the nuances of reactions to the integration of memory of the Holocaust into national history narratives of Belarus and Ukraine. It is referred to more comprehensive internal and external contexts. The points are the understanding of this context and an attempt to designate the causes of ethnocentrism: are they typical for Belarusians? And in this case it is worth referring to another "party" - to the way Jews in Belarus themselves construct their identity on the basis of the memory of the Holocaust.

Unfortunately, significant advanced studies on the problematic of Jewish identity construction in

Belarus have not been conducted. Nevertheless, I have brought this question up to the title of this report for no other reason than that I wanted to shift attention from the painful topic of Belarusian identity and history, and the reaction of Belarusians to the problematic of the Holocaust to some other aspects, such as the general understanding of mechanisms functioning both in cases of Belarusian identity and Jewish identity in the Belarusian context.

If one looks through all the issues of the monthly newspaper *Aviv* (publisher: the Union of Belarusian Jewish Public Associations and Communities) published since 1992 or the materials of the monthly newspaper *Berega* (Shores, publisher: Jewish Religious Association of Belarus), a range of peculiarities, demonstrating these mechanisms, can be noticed.

According to the publications, Belarusian Jews connect identity to a large extent with the topicality of the Holocaust. Since 1991, both for ethnic Belarusians and Belarusian Jews, a "reopening" of the history of the Second World War has taken place. For Belarusians (along with all the citizens of the former USSR) the topics of war prisoners, *Ostarbeiter* (German: eastern workers), scale and motives of collaboration, specifics of the partisan movement, defeat in the first days of war and so on had been closed.

For Belarusian Jews the issues of the Jewish resistance, all aspects of relations with the non-Jewish population and occupation regime, topics of Antisemitism in the partisan movement and so on had been closed. As it was in the case of ethnic Belarusians, (I am talking about the discourse from newspaper publications) the "nationalization" of the Second World War memory of Belarusian Jews started taking place. However, the core issue was not the actual participation of ethnic Belarusians in war (as it is described in the official discourse of Lukashenka's period), but memory of the Holocaust.

The figures of speech used while writing articles about the Second World War and the Holocaust in the Jewish periodicals *Aviv* and *Berega* coincide with the non-Jewish periodicals very often. This indicates not only the general socialization of the authors (including the "leftovers" of the Soviet discourse on the memory of war), but also some determined cultural settings and schemes of interpretations, which work similarly.

In particular, one such model of interpretation is the use of the notion of "Antisemitism" while explaining the events of the Holocaust history in Belarus, that is often used not only in the newspapers *Aviv* and *Berega*, but also in other periodicals.

In the article "Commemorative causality", Timothy Snyder underlines that

> [w]ithout Hitler's anti-Semitism, his understanding and presentation of Jews as a global threat to Germany, the Holocaust would not have happened. [...] But a plausible historical explanation of any significant historical event must be plural, entangling in prose multiple lines of causality that together are not only necessary but sufficient. For the purposes of explaining the Holocaust, then, anti-Semitism is not enough.[29]

Snyder also designates the established tradition to consider those citizens of Ukraine who lived in the East of Europe as "Antisemite" *per se*, especially compared to citizens of Western Europe.[30] Snyder's bullet points applied to the Belarusian situation mean that Antisemitism is necessary to be used as an explanatory model, but not for all events of the history of the Holocaust. It has already been mentioned to a certain extent by those who studied its history in the Belarusian context, for example, by Martin Dean, when he determined the motivation of collaborators.[31] Moreover, while using this explanation a very particular response of the ethno-centrist "sensitivity" (when the reaction to accusations of Antisemitism is put ahead of all other issues) may occur.

Thus, we are again coming back to the question of to what extent the events of the Holocaust in Belarus are studied, to what extent we can avoid generalizations, aggravating such an ethno-centrist sensitivity pertaining to Belarusians (who do not plead guilty to Antisemitism) or the sensitivity of Jews (who react to invectives against them). Could we speak precisely about "ethnocentrism" or should we talk about some other issues?

From our point of view, there are two reasons for possible intensification of such sensitivity and sensitivity of the provisional ethnocentrism.

The first one is connected with the difference between memory (as particular experience) and history (as reflexive and *experimentum crucis*) that has been recently forgotten, but widely discussed by contemporary researchers of the problematic of memory. The versions of politically-biased and emotional collective memory substitute reflection, and often it is impossible to discuss calmly the issue of the Holocaust.

The second reason is tied with the peculiarities of nation building. In Belarus there are still

on-going debates on topics of national identity and whether the nation has been formed or not. In the face of them, the issue of the Holocaust represents itself as a significant challenge (due to various reasons), which is different from the "unstable" versions of nation-building. In the face of these debates on the "nation" and concentration on the structuralization of the world only by "national" means, the topicality of memory of the Holocaust itself is perceived by some Belarusians as a Jewish "national" project, which "succeeded" compared to the Belarusian "incomplete" (according to their point of view) one.

There will be no references here, however, as this is an environment of social networks and Internet forums in Belarus. The problem is that the "completion" of the national project in its classic way is not possible for Belarusians because we are living in a period of rethinking of the notion and the content of the term "nation-state" and the appearance of various integration projects (EU or EurAsEC).

In fact, we are facing an interesting phenomenon of "parallel" constructs of identity and memory in the Belarusian context. If one were to speak about the memory of the Holocaust – on the one hand is the Belarusian version, on the other is the Jewish one. There are many commonalities between them, but interaction and synthesis are less likely to happen.

To what extent are interaction and synthesis possible? This is not a specific topic of the report, but the theoretical ideas of Rogers Brubaker represented in his book *Ethnicity without groups*, where he claims to rethink our approaches to the notions of identity, ethnicity, nation and so on can be fruitful. He calls for the need to get rid of "groupism," "the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis (and basic constituents of the social world)."[32] He also claims that

> [t]he study of ethnicity - even the study of ethnic conflict - should not, in short, be reduced to, or even centered on, the study of ethnic groups.[33]

Brubaker "does not eliminate" the notion of "group" or "ethnicity," but deprives these notions of their substantiality, describes their dynamics and looks for new methods of their understanding.[34] When applying these ideas to the Belarusian context, at least it means not so much separate study on "Jews" and "Belarusians" as accustomed in the framework of the concept of "titular nation" and "minority" as the shift to the more general phenomena. For example, we should talk about the problematic of the Holocaust and try not to create a "hierarchy of victims," but discover the general mechanisms that led to the Catastrophe in Belarus. Historians should work on projects including research on all participants of the events, trying to avoid intensification of ethno-centrist sensitivity and demonstrate its reasons and danger.

If in the first part of the text we were talking about the peculiarities of "historical culture" in Belarus, in the second part we came to the conclusion that while working with the topic of the Holocaust, we face a range of issues going beyond the scope of the Belarusian context. Today we can and must work intellectually with the notions of "ethnicity," "national identity," the problematic of the Holocaust, introducing those to the all-European context, where this topicality exists. We can and must change our representations of the history of nation, minorities and ethnicity.

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Belarusian (Cyrillic/Latin)	**Polish** (Latin)	**Russian** (Cyrillic/Latin)	**Yiddish** (Jewish/Latin)	**Other forms** (if relevant)
Аўгустаў / Aŭhustaŭ	Augustów	Августов / Avgustov	יאַגעסטאָוו / Yagestov	
Бабруйск / Babrujsk	Bobrujsk	Бобруйск / Bobruisk	באברויסק / Bobroisk	
Беласток / Bielastok	Białystok	Белосток / Belostok	ביאליסטאק /Byalistok	
Бешанковічы / Biešankovičy	Bieszenkowicze	Бешенковичи / Beshenkovichi	בעשענקאָוויטש / Bishenkovitz	
Брэст / Brest	Brześć	Брест / Brest	בריסק Brisk	
Валожын / Valožyn	Wołożyn	Воложин / Volozhin	וואלאזשין / Volozshin	
Ваўкавыск / Vaŭkavysk	Wołkowysk	Волковыск / Volkovysk	וואלקאוויסק / Volkavisk	
Вілейка / Viliejka	Wilejka	Вилейка / Vileyka	ווילייקע / Vileike	
Вільня / Viĺnia	Wilno	Вильна / Vilna	ווילנע / Vilne	Vilnius (Lithuanian)
Віцебск / Viciebsk	Witebsk	Витебск / Vitebsk	ויטעבסק / Vitebsk	
Высокае / Vysokaje (Высокалітоўск) / (Vysokalitoŭsk)	Wysokie (Wysokie Litewskie)	Высокое / Vysokoe Высоко-Литовск / Vysoko-Litovsk	וויסאָקא־-ליטאווסק / Visoka-Litovsk	
Гайнаўка / Hajnaŭka	Hajnówka	Гайновка / Gainovka	גייַנעווקע / Gainevke	
Гарадок / Haradok	Gródek	Городок / Gorodok	הורודוק / Horodok	
Гомель / Homieĺ	Homel	Гомель / Gomel	האָמל / Homl	
Горкі / Horki	Horki	Горки / Gorki	האָרקי / Horki	
Гродна / Hrodna	Grodno	Гродно / Grodno historically also: Гродна/Grodna	גראָדנע / Grodne	
Дзісна / Dzisna	Dzisna	Дисна / Disna	דיסנע / Disne	
Дзятлава / Dziatlava	Zdzięcioł	Дятлово / Dyatlovo	זשעטל / Zhetl	
Дуброўна / Dubroŭna	Dubrowna (Dąbrowna)	Дубровно / Dubrovno	דובראָוונאָ / Dubrovno	
Жыткавічы / Žytkavičy	Żytkowicze	Житковичи / Zhitkovichi	זשיטקאָוויטש / Zshitkovitch	
Зэльва / Zeĺva	Zelwa	Зельва / Zelva	זעלווע / Zelva	
Іўе / Iŭje	Iwie	Ивье/Ivye	אייוויע / Ivie	
Камянец / Kamianiec (Літоўскі) / (Litoŭski)	Kamieniec (Kamieniec Litewski)	Каменец / Kamenets (historically also: Kamenetz)	קאמעניץ / Kamenits ליטא / Lita	
Капыль / Kapyĺ	Kopyl	Копыль / Kopyl	קאפולע /Kapulie	
Клімавічы / Klimavičy	Klimowicze	Климовичи / Klimovichi	קלימאָוויטש /Klimovitch	
Копысь / Kopyś	Kopyś	Копысь / Kopys	קאפוסט /Kapust	
Косава / Kosava	Kosów (Kosów Poleski)	Коссово / Kossovo	קאסאוו /Kosov	
Коўна / Koŭna	Kowno	Ковно / Kovno (Ковна) / (Kovna)	קאָוונע /Kovne	Kaunas (Lithuanian)
Крынкі / Krynki	Krynki	Крынки / Krynki	קרינקי / Krinki	
Лепель / Lepieĺ	Lepel	Лепель / Lepel	ליעפּליע /Leple	

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Belarusian (Cyrillic/Latin)	Polish (Latin)	Russian (Cyrillic/Latin)	Yiddish (Jewish/Latin)	Other forms (if relevant)
Лібава / Libava	Lipawa	Либава / Libava	ליבאַווע / Libave	Liepāja (Latvian)
Люцын / Liucyn	Lucyn	Люцин / Liutsin	לוצין / Lutsin	Ludza (Latvian and Latgalian)
Магілёў / Mahilioŭ	Mohylew	Могилёв / Mogilev (historically also: Mohilev)	מאָהלעוו / Mohlev	
Мазыр / Mazyr	Mozyrz	Мозырь / Mozyr	מאזיר / Mozir	
Мінск / Minsk	Mińsk	Минск / Minsk	מינסק /Minsk	
Мір / Mir	Mir	Мир / Mir	מיר / Mir	
Моталь / Motaĺ	Motol	Мотоль / Motol	מוטלה / Motele	
Навагрудак / Navahrudak	Nowogródek	Новогрудок / Novogrudok	נאַוואַרעדאָק / Navaredak	
Нясвіж / Niasviž	Nieśwież	Несвиж / Nesvizh	ניעסוויזש / Nesvizsh	
Орша / Orša	Orsza	Орша / Orsha	אורשא / Orsha	
Парычы / Paryčy	Parycze	Паричи / Parichi	פּאָרעטש / Poritch	
Пінск / Pinsk	Pińsk	Пинск / Pinsk	פינסק / Pinsk	
Пружаны / Pružany	Prużana	Пружаны / Pruzhany	פרוזשענע / Pruzhane	
Рагачоў / Rahačoŭ	Rohaczów	Рогачёв / Rogachev	ראָגאטשעוו / Rogatshev	
Радашковічы / Radaškovičy	Radoszkowicze	Радошковичи / Radoshkovichi	ראדאשקאוויץ / Radoshkovits	
Ружаны / Ružany	Różana	Ружаны / Ruzhany	ראָזשענוי / Rozhenoy	
Свіслач / Svislač	Świsłocz	Свислочь / Svisloch	סיסלעוויטש / Sislevitch	
Скідзель / Skidzieĺ	Skidel	Скидель / Skidel	סקידעל / Skidel	
Слаўгарад / Slaŭharad (Прапойск) /(Prapojsk)	Sławograd (Propojsk)	Славгород / Slavgorod (Пропойск) /(Propoisk)	פראָפּאָיסק / Propoisk	
Слонім / Slonim	Słonim	Слоним / Slonim	סלאנים / Slonim	
Слуцк / Sluck	Słuck	Слуцк / Slutsk	סלוצק / Slutsk	
Смаргонь / Smarhoń	Smorgonie	Сморгонь / Smorgon	סמאָרגאָן / Smorgon	
Смілавічы / Smilavičy	Śmiłowicze	Смиловичи / Smilovichi	סמילאָוויטש / Smilovitch	
Стоўбцы / Stoŭbcy	Stołpce	Столбцы / Stolbtsy	סטויפץ / Stoibtz	
Сувалкі / Suvalki	Suwałki	Сувалки / Suvalki	סואוואַלק / Suvalk	
Тураў / Turaŭ	Turów	Туров / Turov	טורעוו / Turev	
Чэрвень / Červień (Ігумен) /(Ihumien)	Czerwień (Ihumeń)	Червень / Cherven (Игумен) / (Igumen)	אייהומען / Eihumen	
Чэрыкаў / Čerykaŭ	Czeryków	Чериков / Cherikov	טשעריקאָוו / Tcherikov	
Шклоў / Šklоŭ	Szklów	Шклов / Shklov	שקלאָוו / Shklov	
Шчучын / Ščučyn	Szczuczyn (Szczuczyn Litewski)	Шчучин / Shchuchin	שטשוטשין / Shtutchin	

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